the future of electronic entertainment issue#127

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PLAYSTATION 2 | XBOX | GAMECUBE | PC | GBA

Killzone: Edge reveals Sony's splendid secret shooter

Previewed: OutRun2, Metal Arms, Homeworld 2, Pillage, Samurai 2

Reviewed: Viewtiful Joe, Ka 2, Metal Slug 3, Advance Wars 2, Dino Crisis 3, Virtual-On Marz

The history of RPGs; Larry Holland interview; The making of Sega Rally

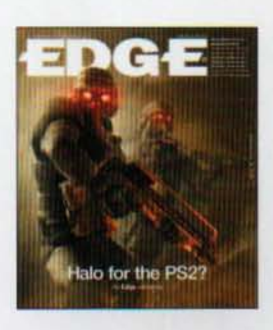
September 2003 £4 ¥2150

Halo for the PS2?

An **Edge** exclusive







Not that **Edge** hadn't noticed, but it is nevertheless surprising to again realise that the PS2 hasn't got a format-exclusive exponent of the FPS genre able to compete at a global level. Looking at the other popular gaming categories you find *Gran Turismo*, *Final Fantasy* and *Jak and Daxter*, to name the franchise trio that pops immediately into our sights. These are games forming part of Sony's carefully defined strategy that ensures its console can either steal, or at the very least share, the spotlight focused on the most significant genres – a crucial component in the company's relentless drive to entice gamers to join its record-breaking gaming community.

It's struggled with the firstperson shooter, though. Three years into its limited lifespan, the PS2 still hasn't got an FPS it can call its own – certainly nothing to match the importance of *Half-Life* or *Halo*'s original release. And with the next instalments from Valve and Bungie (not forgetting id's *Doom III*) destined to appear on Xbox, it needs one. Letting Microsoft enter the next next-generation war in such a commanding position over such a crucial gaming genre – even if only from the perception of gamers – would be foolish.

Besides, PlayStation2 owners are clearly crying out for a tactical, military-based FPS able to rival the kind PC and Xbox players already enjoy. The fury of Internet forum activity surrounding *Killzone*, a game, let's not forget, that no one outside of SCEE or Guerrilla (and now **Edge**) has seen – a game without pedigree – is evidence of this.

Is *Killzone* that game? **Edge** is no fortune-teller, preferring at this stage to rely on facts rather than conjecture. You'll find those on p52.



Features









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Editorial
Future Publishing 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW
Telephone +44 (0)1225 442244
Fax +44 (0)1225 732275
Email edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge Website www.edge-online.com

People on Edge
João Diniz-Sanches editor
Darren Phillips art editor
David McCarthy deputy editor
Mark Walbank associate editor
Scott Bradbury production editor
Margaret Robertson writer
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau
Ste Curran editor-at-large

Contributors
Mr Biffo, Jon Jordan, Toshihiro Nagoshi, Simon Parkin, Steven Poole, RedEye, Mark Southerns, John Walker, Steve Williams

Geekcorps news in **E**125 by **Aleks Krotoski**

Production
Kirsty Bell senior production coordinator
Rose Griffiths production manager
Colin Polis commercial buyer

Circulation
Tom Shaw product manager
Regina Erak circulation manager

Advertising
Jayne Caple deputy advertising director
Simon Tapscott senior advertising manager
Liz Dennys advertising manager
Andrew Church recruitment executive
Advertising phone 01225 442244

Publishing
James Binns publisher
Tamara Longden promotions manager
Simon Wear international licensing director
Robert Price group publishing director

Subscriptions & distribution
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton TA11 7BR
Telephone 01458 271184
Fax 01458 271146
Email games.subs@futurenet.co.uk

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Distribution, 86 Newman Street, London W1
Telephone 0207 907 6000
Can't find **Edge**? **James Greenwood** 01225

Senior management
Roger Parry non-executive chairman
Greg Ingham chief executive
Colin Morrison chief operating officer & MD
John Bowman group finance director

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the 'magical sound shower' issue























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"I am the best you'll ever see."
"So I keep hearing. Shall we find out?"

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frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



The future of independents

As the power of UK publishers waned, so developers learnt to take control of their destinies. But as budgets rise and next generation hardware solidifies, how will the UK independent scene survive?

The glass of independent UK development: is it half full or half empty? On one hand, there have been plenty of success stories over the past couple of years. Free Radical Design, Pivotal, Creative Assembly, Vis, Lionhead and Bizarre Creations have released million-selling games based on home-grown concepts. On the other, respected studios such as Software Creations, Runecraft, Curly Monsters and IG have paid a hefty price. Publisher restructuring has also hit the financial health of high-profile developers such as Argonaut, Warthog and Kuju. All have posted losses in their current financial reports because of cash owed to them by ailing publishers and delays in signing key projects.

Andrew Oliver, CTO of Blitz Games agrees the industry finds itself in a strange situation. "Many developers are in a far weaker position financially than they were a couple of years ago whereas technically they are much stronger," he says.

"Unfortunately, developers have to deal with at least three types of customer, and each has a different agenda," reckons **Ashley Hall**, Warthog's CEO. "Publishers want to make money. The retailers and marketing people want games with a proven track record or games that are similar to games with a proven track record so they can predict sales. In addition, the console vendors want us to make their hardware look incredibly powerful."

According to Blitz's COO, **Nigel Davies**, the latter group, in particular, is becoming increasingly problematic. "The console manufacturers are raising the quality bar and hence reducing the number of games they will approve," he explains.

Every console game released has to be approved by the console manufacturer, both with respect to its concept, as well as issues such as quality assurance. In addition, Sony and Microsoft now require all games submitted to contain some online element, regardless of style or genre. The result is an environment where publishers have had to radically review their number of console releases and therefore have downsized the number of games in development. The knock-on effect? There are more independent developers than available publishing contracts.

Caught between these bigger, more powerful players, developers are having to become a lot more commercially canny in order to survive. "We've always had to be innovative when it comes to making games. Now you have to be extremely savvy in business as well," ponders Computer Artworks' creative director **William Latham**. He's recently appointed a financial director and in-house lawyer for this reason.

Walk of life

To some degree, this sort of shakeout epitomises the way it's always been for independent developers. Compared to the money required to launch a publisher, the barriers of entry for developers are low. Companies will continually be launched, while others go to the wall. Even now, when conventional wisdom demands team sizes of 30 or 40 people, startups such as Brat Design, which is currently completing the highly-anticipated PC shooter *Breed*, can create a game with less than ten members of staff. And because games are a high-risk, high-reward business, there will always be publishers willing to gamble on a good idea. Maybe the fluid nature of the industry could even been seen as a positive sign. In a sense, it's the same creative flair which drives much of UK culture, whether it be games, music, film, fashion or design.

> "How often do we see a publisher acquire a great external team, only for key staff to leave, unable to work in a corporate environment?"

Jonathan Newth, managing director at Kuju, certainly thinks a strong UK independent development sector is vital for maintaining innovation in the industry. "By far our most important strength is that independents are culturally more suited to producing creative, original content and to pushing the envelope on a particular platform," he says. "Large in-house teams tend to attract the risk-averse employees. How often do we see a publisher acquire a great external team, only for key staff to leave a year later citing inability to work in a corporate environment?"

Indeed, one of the strongest complaints of UK developers is that while they provide innovation, they rarely feel they are getting justly rewarded for the work they do. One issue is the perception that publishers are

Card images ©Tricia Newell, cards from 'The Mystic Tarot' published in the UK by Rider (Random House)

Good news: Bad news

Warthog
Good news: Signed a deal with EA to develop *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* for PlayStation2, Xbox and GameCube for a Christmas 2003 release.
Bad news: Expects to report a pre-tax loss in the region of £750,000 for the current financial year because of the delays of signing up one game to a new publisher, following what it refers to as 'the financial failure of the original publisher'.

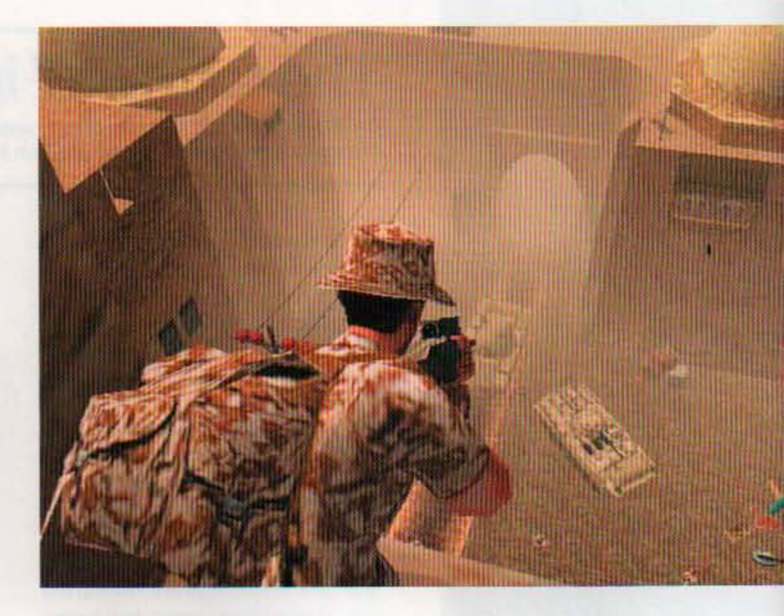
Argonaut
Good news: Hopes remain high for *I-Ninja*, Argonaut's remaining game signed to Namco, while it continues a successful collaboration with Lego for its *Bionicle* franchise.
Bad news: Cute beat 'em *Orchid* was canned, while long-term project *Malice* has been dropped by Vivendi although it is helping Argonaut to find another publisher.

Blitz Games
Good news: Currently working on high-profile game based on the forthcoming Will Smith movie 'Bad Boys II' for Empire.
Bad news: The European rights for its completed *Cubix* game remain caught up in the implosion and subsequent asset sale of US publisher 3DO.

Kuju
Good news: Signed a deal with Konami for multiformat original title; the first such deal the Japanese publisher has signed with a European developer.
Bad news: Reported a loss of around £500,000 in the last financial year due to doubtful debts from a single project as well as suffering delays to other key projects.







inherently biased towards placing projects with their internal studios, partly because of the way they work out the cost of development.

"It's often the case that UK developers suffer when bidding for contracts because while our price is inclusive of features such as sound, scripts and quality assurance, the publishers seem to forget to take these into account when costing internal development," says Blitz's Nigel Davies. "The result is a false cost advantage for internal teams."

Royalties, or lack of them, are another moot point. "The retail cost of games, and therefore the royalties we get, haven't gone up in line with the cost of developing a

> "The next console transition clearly adds enormously to the risk of being a game developer. It's not a problem for other sectors"

triple-A title," says Free Radical Design's co-director **Karl Hilton**. "From that point of view, it has become more challenging to compete in the world market and make good levels of profit."

"In general, it does seem to be the case that the industry is tailored so developers don't do too well out of success," agrees William Latham, adding, "I think there will be some changes in this respect in the future." As he points out however, developers need to take responsibility for their own working practices too. "Royalties aren't the whole picture," he continues. "It's also about developers ensuring they are working efficiently. If you get that right, publishers can see you've got your act together, and they're more likely to be more generous."

Cost of failure

But while there are fears the commercial squeeze is harming the industry's freedom more than ever before, others cite the failures of a previous generation of highly original content as a justified reason for publishers' caution. Games such as Confounding Factor's *Galleon*, Elixir's *Republic* and Argonaut's *Malice* were started in the late 1990s and, expensively, at the time of writing remain uncompleted.

"The first rule of business is to give the customer what they want. If they want *Harry Potter*, *FIFA* or *Madden*, then let them have it," states **Karl Jeffery**, CEO of Climax, a company which has grown from years of mundane if well-regarded contract work on licenses such as *Theme Park*, *Power Rangers* and *SpongeBob Squarepants* to become one of the most powerful independent developers in the UK.

Unsurprisingly, Jeffery has a gung-ho view of the future. "We're in an incredibly strong position," he boasts, claiming; "Climax is more profitable than all the other UK developers added together."

For him the solution to the challenges facing the industry – notably the rising cost of development and the risk-averse nature of publishers – is simple; stop complaining and start competing. "Independent developers should be using their own resources to innovate, take risks and create the hits of tomorrow," he says.

With that in mind Climax is planning to expand from its current level of 350 to 500 people, organised in six studios, one of which is in LA. "But even then we will only have bandwidth to handle eight or so major franchises," Jeffrey says, highlighting the industry perception that the quality bar will continue to rise, as 10 per cent of games suck up 90 per cent of industry revenues.

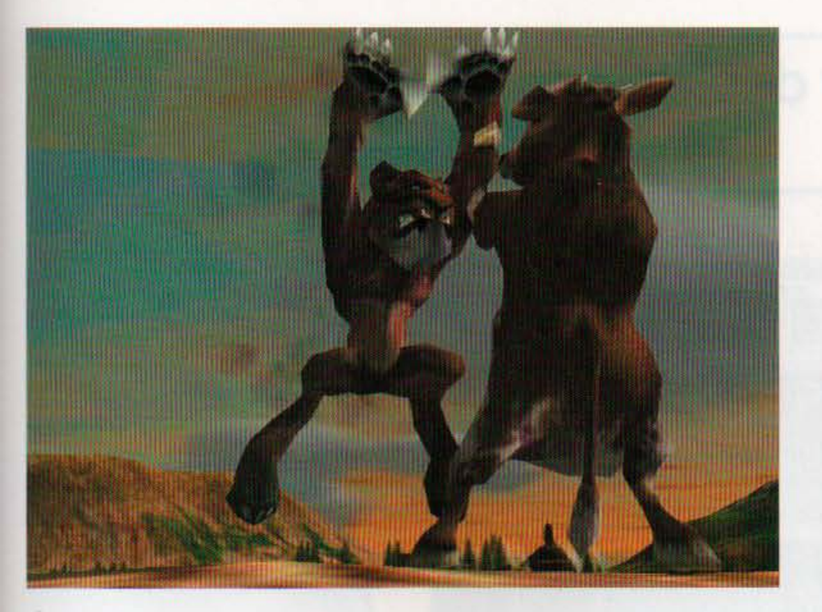
Working the cycle

Perhaps the biggest long-term worry for the UK independents is the inevitably of change however. Just as they have got used to working on a piece of hardware, so they know they have to start dealing with something new. The next console transition predicted to hit in 2005/2006, clearly adds enormously to the risk of being a game developer. It's not a problem faced by the music, film, fashion or design sectors.

Last time round the transition between PSone and PlayStation2 was badly handled, which didn't help matters. As publishers moved too quickly to the new hardware, developers' income was significantly reduced as royalties from games released for the large PSone market were replaced by games that failed to break even in a lacklustre PlayStation2 market. It's unlikely the same thing will happen next time but there is nervousness that Sony, in particularly, will take the opportunity to limit the number of developers who gain early access to its new hard-to-program box of tricks. "The big issue will be which studios get devkits first. There could be another cull of developers at that point," reckons Latham.

"Climax's directors discuss the subject of next generation consoles almost every day," reveals Jeffery, somewhat predictably. "Managing console transition is a core-competency of any respectable games company and our advanced technology group has been working on tools for over a year now."

Another worry is the knock-on effects



There have been plenty of success stories from independent UK development studios in recent years. *TimeSplitters*, *Conflict: Desert Storm*, *Total War*, *State of Emergency*, *Black & White* and *Project Gotham* have all sold more than a million





on team size. Some malcontents suggested that PlayStation2 team sizes would have to rise to over 100. Thankfully that didn't happen but some developers are already preparing for that eventuality.

"We forecast team sizes for PlayStation3 and Xbox2 will peak to between 50-100 people," says Ashley Hall. "That's what we're changing our company to accommodate; we're improving our financial base, our cross-platform tools, our processes and management."

Certainly with many UK developers consisting of less than 50 staff, the spectre of having a whole studio working on one game should be enough to provoke smaller studios into action. One move has been the formation of Game Republic, a consortium of Northern developers, which has been set up with funding from Yorkshire Forward, a local government funding organisation. Within this framework, developers such as The Code Monkeys, Team 17 and Revolution hope to boost their bargaining power with publishers, as well as collaborate on projects.

Whether government-funded bodies is the way forward for the industry is a moot point, but neither is inaction. What's obvious is that the next couple of years will be difficult ones for many developers.

"It's a classic scenario of the survival of the fittest," ends **Colin Bell**, managing director of Juice Games, a startup born out of the embers of Rage Warrington. "Those that make it will be more professionally managed and better funded but there will be fewer of us."

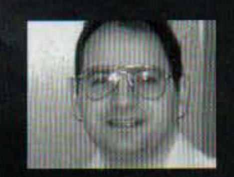
Upon a star

Edge asked the heads of five UK developers, what changes they would make to the industry if they had one wish:

Ashley Hall, CEO, Warthog
Ensure publishers pay their bills exactly on time and afford the credit which is due to the Herculean efforts produced on a daily basis by independent development teams in the UK.


Ashley Hall, CEO, Warthog

Andrew Oliver, CTO, Blitz
Get trust from our publishers. Trust that we can deliver, trust that we can handle bigger budgets responsibly and trust that the experienced developers who are still left on the playing field really do know what they're doing.


Andrew Oliver, CTO, Blitz

Karl Jeffery, CEO, Climax
Persuade Microsoft to buy us for twice what they paid for Rare.


Karl Jeffery, CEO, Climax

Jason Kingsley, CEO, Rebellion
Remind publishers that time lost at the beginning agreement stage of a deal is time lost at the end of the project.


Jason Kingsley, CEO, Rebellion

Jonathan Newth, MD, Kuju
Speed up the decision making process within publishers and the attendant contract negotiation process. I don't understand how it can take months for lawyers to draw up a contract.


Jonathan Newth, MD, Kuju

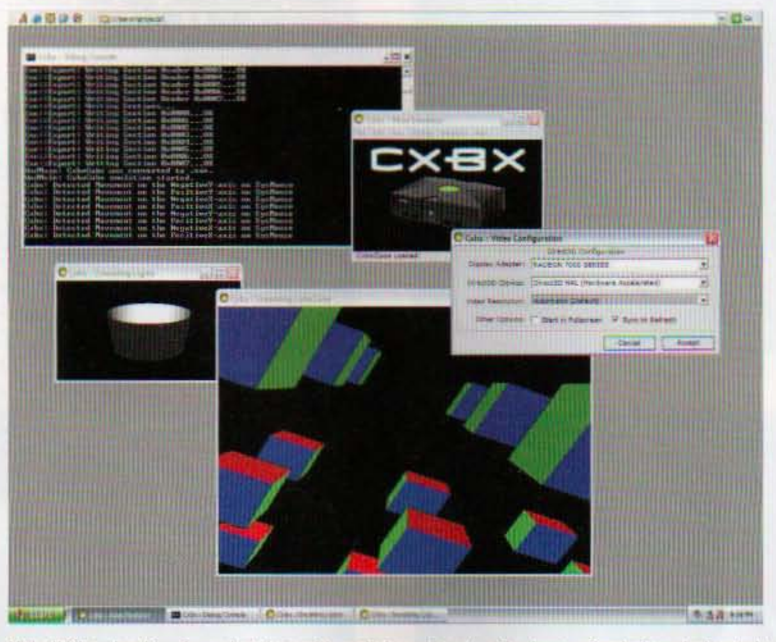
Xbox homebrew community declares independence

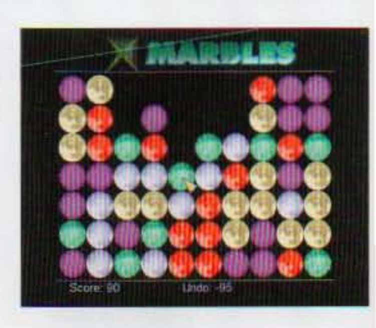
Linux hackers' demands come to nought; Microsoft's console security blown apart

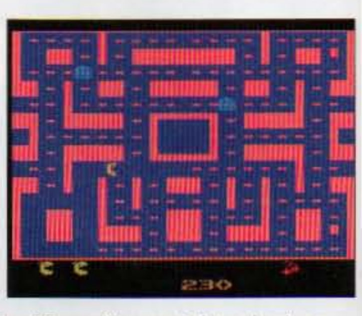


Xbox Emulation

If the disintegration of the Xbox's security wasn't enough bad news for Microsoft, the last few weeks have seen significant improvements in the PC-based Xbox emulator CxBx. The impressive project reached version 0.76, and is now capable of running several Xbox technology demos and some homebrew programs. While full compatibility with commercial games still appears some way off, Acclaim's *Turok Evolution* recently received the honour of being the first Xbox game to show signs of life on a PC, in the shape of a "This disc is damaged or dirty" error message.







Not all Xbox hacking is undertaken with malicious intent, with plenty of websites dedicated to turning Microsoft's console into a hardware platform that supports homebrew programming. Nevertheless, there are no shades of grey for the defenders of intellectual property rights

It was a situation that was always going to end in acrimony and litigation. At the start of June, a team calling themselves 'Free-X' issued an ultimatum to Microsoft: release code that would let consumers run Linux on an unmodified Xbox, or suffer Free-X's self-created solution, a hack the team alleged would blow the system's copy protection apart. Would the phenomenally rich corporation submit to copyright blackmail? Would the fervently pro-Linux team decide against releasing its epoch-defining piece of code? Predictably, both answers were 'no'.

Some history. A prize of $200,000 is on offer to the first team to successfully get Linux to boot on Xbox, but the problem hacking teams have always faced hinges around the system's 2048-bit security. Before the machine attempts to run a piece of code, it first checks to see if it's been digitally signed by Microsoft. If it hasn't, it won't run, unless you've got a hardware modification that will circumvent the company's copy protection. For the first eighteen months of the Xbox's life this required you to install a modchip.

Then, came the discovery of the 'Habibi' exploit, a hack which exploited an overflow buffer bug in the Save Game loader of EA's *Agent Under Fire*, and allowed users to get code of their choice onto the Xbox's hard disk for the first time. Still, in order to run unauthorised programs, users had to open their box and solder two joints. Hardly a mammoth task of electronic engineering, but still enough to put many people off.

No more. On July 4 – "the day of the Xbox independence" read the documentation, in marginally broken English – Free-X's exploit leaked onto the net, and the security systems in the black box suffered their first total compromise. Based on the Habibi method the hack requires nothing more than an Xbox, a copy of *Agent Under Fire* or Microsoft's own *Mech Assault*, and a method of getting code from a PC onto a memory card. Free-X's initial release only allowed users to boot Linux, but a host of copycat hacks quickly followed, opening the system to everything from the popular dashboard replacement EvolutionX to pirated software.

It's this last point, piracy, that Free-X claim it was trying to avoid when giving Microsoft the choice to release its own Linux loader. But it was never a choice for Microsoft; Linux is a cancer to the company, one that's slowly eating away at its main revenue stream. Besides, even if the Free-X team kept its promise to keep the exploit under wraps, there's no guarantee that another team wouldn't independently discover it within months, weeks, or even days.

Microsoft's only option was, and remains, litigation, but clearly this is something akin to trying to sue the horse after it's bolted; the exploit is out, and will remain in the public domain forever. A dashboard update will prevent Xbox Live users from taking advantage, but online users still represent a minority of those who own boxes, and, **Edge** would speculate, just as small a proportion of those interested in taking advantage of the now pirate-friendly waters of the Xbox.





News that PC emulation of Xbox software is progressing apace presents Microsoft with yet more unwelcome news

London gears up for Games Week

Developers to receive their own private space as every part of the gaming audience is catered for by event organisers

This August sees a variety of videogame related events take place as part of the newly branded London Games Week. Taking place from August 25-31, the mainstay of the event will be ECTS, Game Developers Conference Europe (GDCE) and PlayStation Experience – all located at Earls Court in central London. But the week will also witness various press launches, parties and awards ceremonies, including the Entertainment Software Charity ball on August 28 and the 'Develop' Awards on August 27 in Kensington.

Now in its 14th year, ECTS 2003 takes place at Earls Court from August 27-29, with several high-profile publishers already confirmed, including Activision, Atari, ATI, BigBen, Codemasters, Eidos, Intel, Konami, Microsoft, nVidia, Nokia, Sammy, Sony, THQ, Ubi Soft and Vivendi. Once again, the event features its own awards ceremony (on August 28), presented this year by TV presenter, Kate Russell.

And of course, the PlayStation Experience returns for its second year, and will be open to the public from August 28-31, featuring double the floor space, more content than last year, and live entertainment. Tickets are on sale either from the event Website (www.playstationexperience.com) or by telephone on 0870 4445208 priced £6 per session plus booking fee.

The development community is to be especially well catered for by London Games Week, first by GDCE, which is now in its third year, and which runs from August 26-29, but also by the introduction of Games Market. GDCE will once again see various keynotes, lectures, tutorials, panels and roundtables over the course of its four-day span. This year's keynote speaker is Naughty Dog's Jason Rubin, arguing that graphics no longer matter to most gamers, while other highlights include a 'developer deathmatch' between Peter Molyneux and Gary Penn, the 'Are you Game?' keynote panel (which is perhaps better described as a pub quiz), and a series of panels devoted to the transition to next generation hardware platforms.

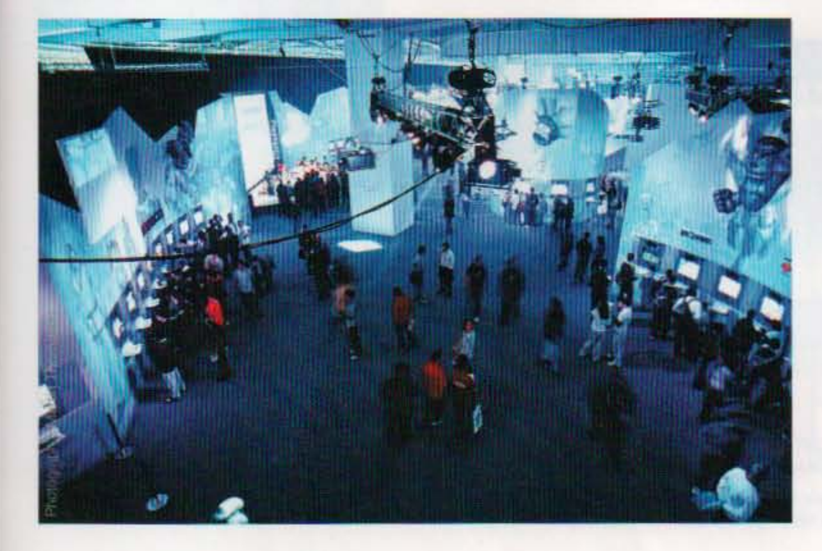
Games Market is a new addition to the line up of videogame events, and is jointly organised by TIGA and ECTS/GDCE organiser CMP specifically for developers. It runs from August 28-29, providing private meeting space for developers to meet with publishers in a bid to get their games signed. Commenting on the new addition, TIGA Executive member **Ian Baverstock** said: "A focused market for acquisition will deliver a benefit to all involved – not only on logistical and cost reasons but also to keep European indie development at the cutting edge of the global marketplace for new content."

Visit www.londongamesweek.com for more information about the various individual events.

"Highlights include a 'developer deathmatch' between Peter Molyneux and Gary Penn and the 'Are you Game?' keynote pub quiz"



The PlayStation Experience will form the centrepiece of London Games Week for members of the public, though developers, publishers and retailers have their own events







Edinburgh Game Festival momentum growing

Clive Tyldesley to present the future of interactive entertainment at this year's Edinburgh Festival

This August will see the inaugural Edinburgh International Games Festival (EIGF) take place as part of the fringe of the overall Edinburgh Festival, in a bid to increase the public's awareness and understanding of videogames, and to promote the unique cultural contribution of the medium. It will consist of a week-long public exhibition as well as a one-day seminar for members of the industry, culminating in an awards dinner at which the winner of the event award for excellence and innovation will be announced. The event has been set up in association with TIGA, ELSPA and Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian, and will be sponsored by Microsoft, Sony, Nintendo, nVidia and Nokia N-Gage, all of whom will have their hardware on display at the exhibition.

Thus, as part of the EIGF, the Go Play Games event will allow members of the public to enjoy a hands-on experience of current and forthcoming titles on PlayStation2, GameCube and Xbox and on PC via nVidia hardware. Attendees will also get a chance to play on Nokia's N-Gage platform in advance of its release, and in the plush surroundings of Edinburgh's Royal Museum will also be able to take in a series of lectures and workshops. The eight day exposition will also encompass a vote for attendees' favourite game, and a competition to win a state-of-the-art games PC, courtesy of nVidia. Entrance to the event is free for children under 12, while adult admission is £2 and concessions £1. It runs from August 11-18, and will be open from 10am (Monday to Saturday) and 12pm (on Sunday).

In addition to the public event, the EIGF will also incorporate a one-day conference at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre on August 18, aimed at members of the industry itself. The day will be hosted by Clive Tyldesley and incorporate various lectures, roundtable discussions and panel events. Some of the programme highlights to have caught **Edge**'s eye include The Worldview Lecture by Seamus Blackley, the 'Hollywood or Bust' panel session, and the climax of the day, 'The Beautiful Game: Pig Bladders will Fly', a 'debate' to determine the greatest football game ever made, which will be hosted by well-known football pundit, Danny Kelly.

Finally, the festival will conclude with the presentation of the inaugural award for excellence and innovation, which **Edge** is sponsoring. **Edge** will also have the casting vote over a nine-strong jury of industry notables, who will be choosing the winner from a shortlist of 25 nominees provided by the magazine according to a set of judging criteria that match the cultural focus of the festival. More information about the award and the festival is available at www.eigf.co.uk



The festival is aimed at celebrating the cultural significance of videogames









The Edinburgh International Conference Centre will host the one-day industry conference, hosted by Clive Tyldesley, featuring speakers ranging from Seamus Blackley to Danny Kelly

Go Play Games

As **Edge** goes to press, the following titles have been confirmed for the Go Play Games event at the Royal Museum:

Big Mutha Truckers
Empire
Burnout 2: Point of Impact
Acclaim
Dance Dance Revolution
Konami
Def Jam Vendetta
Electronic Arts
Enter the Matrix
Atari
EyeToy: Play
Sony
FIFA 2003
Electronic Arts
Gran Turismo 4
Sony
Halo: Combat Evolved
Microsoft
Ikaruga
Atari
Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy
Sony
Jet Set Radio Future
Sega
Kung Fu Chaos
Microsoft
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness
Eidos Interactive
MotoGP 2: Ultimate Racing Technology
THQ
Panzer Dragoon Orta
Atari
Pikmin
Nintendo
Pro Evolution Soccer 2
Konami
Rez
Sega
Samba de Amigo
Sega
Sonic Adventure DX Director's Cut
Sega
Starsky & Hutch
Empire
Super Monkey Ball 2
Sega
Hulk
Vivendi Universal
The Simpsons Road Rage
Electronic Arts
The Sims 2
Electronic Arts
TimeSplitters2
Eidos Interactive
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4
Activision
Super Mario Sunshine
Nintendo
Virtua Fighter 4
Sony

World Cyber Games 2003 commences

UK Finals to take place this September to find 15 lucky winners who will be off to the grand finals in Seoul



FIFA 2003 **is among the competition games at the UK final qualifying rounds of the World Cyber Games in September**



The UK Finals of this year's World Cyber Games will take place in September at the Shepherds Bush Pavilion in London. Entitled 'The Samsung Challenge' and sponsored by Samsung, nVidia, GAME and Xbox, the event will run from September 5-7, 2003, and give 15 gamers the opportunity to represent the UK in the Grand Final of the World Cyber Games, which will be held at the Olympic Park in Seoul, South Korea, in October. The event will also be open to the public, offering attendees a chance to get their hands on the latest games from various publishers, and view a variety of tech demos from the likes of nVidia.

The competition games include *Age of Mythology*, *Counter-Strike* (which will only be open to pre-qualified teams), *FIFA 2003*, *Halo: Combat Evolved*, *Unreal Tournament 2003* and *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*. Winners and second place runners-up in all the individual games, and the winning team of five players in *Counter-Strike*, will earn the right to represent the UK at the WCG2003 Grand Final in Seoul. Up to 128 players can register for each individual tournament by buying an advance ticket for the day of the tournament. Tickets can be purchased on the UK World Cyber Games Website (http://uk.worldcybergames.org), and although it costs £10 to enter, this price does include a £10 voucher redeemable at GAME stores.

In addition to the main competition games, several publishers will be running their own informal competitions, while event sponsor Microsoft will be taking up the whole mezzanine floor of the hall with Xbox gaming pods and Xbox Live areas.

The prize kitty totals £30,000, largely divided among a number of hi tech products from Samsung, nVidia and Xbox, but the most desirable prizes are the 15 all-expenses paid places on the UK team travelling to South Korea for the Grand Final of the World Cyber Games later this year.

SEC investigates videogame industry

US financial watchdog launches probe into the accounting practices of videogame publishers

As **Edge** goes to press, the US Securities and Exchange Commission has revealed that it is conducting a wide-ranging investigation into videogame publishers and distributors. So far, Acclaim, Activision and THQ have revealed that they have received requests for information in order to assist the investigation, but it is understood that the probe is not limited to these three companies. All three companies are listed on the Nasdaq exchange.

According to a filing by Acclaim, it was notified of the SEC's investigation on July 11, while a further filing, by Activision, reveals that the investigation concerns accounting practices within the industry; in particular the way in which revenue is recognised. Activision was at pains to stress, though, that the investigation did not imply any wrongdoing on the part of the three companies, stating, "The SEC has advised Activision that this request for information should not be construed as an indication from the SEC or its staff that any violation of the law has occurred, nor should it reflect negatively on any person, entity or security."

It is understood that the investigation concerns the relatively widespread industry practice by which publishers recognise revenues on their income statements when units are preordered or reserved – rather than when units actually sell-through to the consumer – witness Eidos' undignified rush to release *Tomb Raider* on the last day of its financial year in order to recognise preorder revenues, for example. Although it's a measure that protects publishers from the vagaries of slippage and quarterly financially reporting, it's certainly a grey area as far as financial regulation is concerned. And although the survey is no sign of wrongdoing, the potential implications of the investigation could have a significant impact on the way in which the videogame industry conducts its business.



The SEC investigation is no sign of wrongdoing, but it could have significant impact on the finances of publishers

CUTTINGS



Tomb Raider tops charts

In spite of its troubled gestation and poor reception at the hands of the specialist gaming press, *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness* had secured the top spot in videogame sales charts for two weeks running when **Edge** went to press, beating Sony's *EyeToy: Play* to the number one position. Nevertheless, there was bad news for Eidos when the investment community reacted negatively to the company's failure to release the game in Europe in time for the end of its financial year. There was also upheaval at the company shortly after the release, in the shape of the resignation of Eidos development director and Core Design managing director Jeremy Heath-Smith from the boards of both companies.

Hitmaker appoints female head

Sega has appointed Mie Kumagai as head of development at design studio Hitmaker. Kumagi will take over from Hisao Oguchi following his departure to replace outgoing president, Hideki Sato. Kumagai-san is the first woman to lead a Sega development company. Having joined the company as a designer in 1993, her CV includes producing roles on *Virtua Tennis* and multiplayer arcade game *The Key of Avalon*. Oguchi-san, meanwhile, faced considerable pressure from shareholders at his inaugural shareholder meeting, but responded with news of new employee incentive schemes and his strategy to grow the company's market share in North America by relying on natively developed software.

Sixth-formers to study games

This September will see the addition of videogames to the curriculum of The Oxford and Cambridge and RSA exam board's AS-level media studies course. Students will study "conflict and competition in computer/video games" by looking at various titles, including *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. According to the exam board, the move is a recognition of the growing importance of the videogame medium, although it doesn't expect the course to be adopted by every tuition centre.

Academic community powers up

Bristol's Watershed hosts symposium for international videogame academic community

Edge has always maintained that computer gaming is woefully ignored as a subject worthy of aesthetic study by the academic world. Which is why we were more than happy to contribute towards the Power Up Symposium organised by the University of Western England this July. We paid for the drinks.

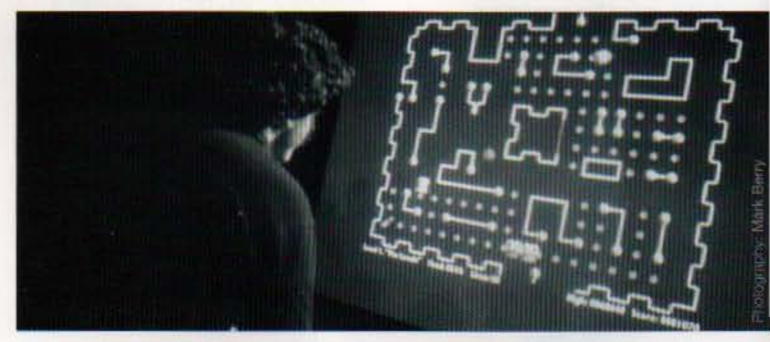
The two days, taking place in Bristol's eclectic Watershed cinema, consisted of 30 or so academics from all over the world gathering to present their most recent research and papers regarding all things gaming, receiving a critical response from their peers. These lectures and debates covered many subjects and niche interests, but were all a part of the meta-narrative: the ambition to explore and identify the "emerging relationships of consumption, play, new media technologies and structures of social and economic power". Or as the event's host **Jon Dovey** put it, "to identify an ideology for computer gaming."

Beginning with an attempt to identify the use of the word 'pleasure' in contemporary media, debate soon opened up to explore the power of play, the diegetic effect of immersion, and why on earth playing computer games is such fun. Things moved towards measuring the effect of so-called 'realism' in gaming, specifically targeting geo-politics and the ideology of interaction with real-world scenarios, and finished discussing the multifarious cultural impacts of the medium.

Perhaps the highlight of both days were the presentations on feminism in gaming, the "female penetration" into the male-dominated culture, and the effect of powerful female player-characters in popular gaming. The opportunity to hear intelligent and researched opinion on this subject was a refreshing change from the media's usual discussion of the size of Lara Croft's chest.

What emerged is that videogaming appears to have bumbled along for the past couple of decades without any sensible analysis of its unique 'text', and this has not been to its advantage. While academics talking to academics is perhaps not the most effective means of encouraging developers to think before they program, it is certainly a beginning to giving the medium the intellectual input it so desperately requires. For more info, look at www.power-up.org.uk





The Power Up symposium follows the success of the original Watershed academic event (shown above), and ranged across topics as varied as realism in gaming to Lara's breasts

ICDC launches two-day development conference

Liverpool's leading videogame department aims to encompass all aspects of the industry in the inaugural Games Production and Development Conference

As the latest entry in what appears to be a rapidly growing market, the International Centre for Digital Content at Liverpool John Moores University will be running a two-day academic videogame conference. The Games Production and Development Conference (GPDC) will take place on October 8 and 9 at the Crowne Plaza hotel on Liverpool's waterfront.

Although the event is essentially being established by an academic organisation, it aims to be much further reaching, taking in all aspects of videogame development, from finance and legal services to the question of government representation.

Speakers at the event include ex-Xbox bigwig Seamus Blackley, Sony's Zeno Colaco, Jason Kingsley of Rebellion, Vincent Shearer from Osborn Clark, Joss Ellis from Argonaut, Vodafone's Tim Harrison and TIGA's Fred Hasson. Over the course of the two days, everything from IP and branding to exploiting expertise from other industries will be considered, and the agenda includes development seminars, lectures, and real-world workshops.

And, although it's yet another new entry into an already crowded videogame calendar, events like the roundtable seminar that aims to discuss whether the UK videogame industry will still exist in five years time suggest that it's probably going to be an invaluable addition.

Registration for the event costs £295 for a two-day pass, or £195 for one day, although discounted rates are available. There's also an opportunity for companies to exhibit at the event, which will include access to the conference.

The ICDC is a part of Liverpool John Moores University that's dedicated to digital games research, development and education. The unit's Masters course in Digital Games offers students insight into games design theory and production methods as well as specialist skills in 3D Modelling and animation. And, as reported in **E**122, graduates from the course have gone on to work at a wide range of videogame developers, including Microsoft, Acclaim, Evolution, Bizarre Creations, Eutechnyx and Warthog, among others.

Visit www.gpdc.co.uk for more information.



ICDC's videogame conference aims to address a whole lot more than just academic interests, encompassing all aspects of videogame production and distribution

Videogames 'bad for you' (again)

Japanese government to launch ten year study to investigate claims that videogames are ruining children's mental health

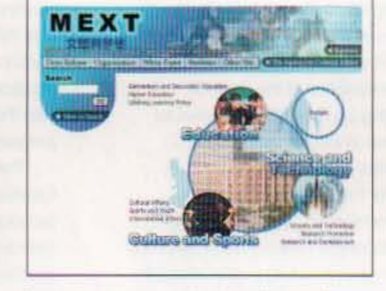
A recent report by 'Famitsu' magazine has revealed that the Japanese government is to conduct a far reaching study into the long-term effects of playing videogames. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is to conduct the study, which will take place over the next ten years, at a cost of tens of millions of dollars. The research will record the lifestyle patterns of one thousand children over ten years, including how much TV they watch and how many games they play, while their mental health and emotional personality will be assessed via neural scans and questionnaires.

The move comes as the videogame industry finds itself under pressure in Japan following a recent neurological study that claims to show that videogames reduce brain-wave activity with negative consequences. At the end of last year, Akio Mori a professor of neurosurgery at the Nihon University's College of Humanities and Sciences, published the results of his own study into the repercussions of playing videogames in a publication called 'Game-nou-no-kyofu' ('Terror of Game Brain').

Mori's study took a group of 240 volunteers aged between 6 to 29 and examined them over the course of several months using electro-encephalography (EEG). The group was divided into three groups; Non-gamers, gamers who spent 1-3 hours during 3-4 days gaming, and gamers who spent 2-7 hours a day playing videogames. The latter group displayed a lack of beta-wave activity more typical of dementia, including a decrease in prefrontal cortex activity, a region of the brain that is associated with emotion and creativity.

Such findings don't actually contradict the conclusions reached by a recent study commissioned by the US Government's National Institute of Health, in spite of the fact that it was widely picked up by the mainstream press last month as evidence that videogames are good for you. That report concluded that playing videogames has a positive impact on gamers, arguing that "videogame playing enhances the capacity of visual attention and its spatial distribution". Although this is indeed a positive conclusion, it doesn't rule out the possibility of Professor Mori's conclusions, suggesting that further research is indeed needed into the psychological impact of sustained gaming.





The Japanese government's willingness to investigate the long-term health effects of videogames is to be welcomed if it matches its good intentions with academic rigour

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
EyeToy: Play	PS2	SCEE	In-house	8
Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter	PS2/Xbox/PC/GC	Vivendi Universal	Warthog	7
Smash Cars	PS2	Metro 3D	Creat Studio	7
Starsky & Hutch	PS2/Xbox/PC	Empire Interactive	Mind's Eye	7
Wario World	GC	Nintendo	Treasure	7
Ghost Master	PC	Empire Interactive	Sick Puppies	6
Star Trek: Elite Force II	PC	Activision	Ritual Entertainment	6
Summer Heat Beach Volleyball	PS2	Acclaim	In-house	6
Ghost Vibration	PS2	Atari	Artoon	5
Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	PS2/PC	Eidos Interactive	Core Design	4
Hulk	Xbox/PS2/GC	Vivendi Universal	Radical Entertainment	3
Naruto 'Gekito Ninja Taisen'	GC	Tomy/Bandai	In-house	3



EyeToy: Play



Starsky & Hutch



Mace Griffin: Bounty Hunter



Smash Cars

CUTTINGS



SP sales continue to surge

Following last issue's report about the rapid sales of GBA SP in North America, this month saw more good news for Nintendo's continued dominance of the handheld sector. The company announced that it has notched up sales of over 2 million Game Boy Advance and Game Boy Advance SP consoles in the UK in the two years since the launch of the original GBA, with over 6.5 million sales across Europe. In related news, Nintendo will not be holding its Spaceworld festival this year, and nor will it be displaying its wares at the Tokyo Game Show, though Nintendo chairman Satoru Iwata will deliver the keynote address at the event.

Xbox sales match GameCube

In its most recent quarterly financial results, Microsoft revealed that revenues for its Home and Entertainment division rose by 8 per cent over the quarter. The results also disclosed global sales of 9.4 million units since the launch of the console, and reveals ambitious sales projections of between 14.5 million and 16 million units by June 2004. In spite of these encouraging results though, the continued commercial underperformance of Xbox in Japan means that, globally, it has only shifted as many units as the GameCube, in spite of Microsoft's continued assertions that it is outperforming Nintendo's console.

PS3 rumour round-up

The latest round of Internet rumours regarding the eventual introduction of PlayStation3 have emerged in the wake of the announcement, earlier this year, that Elpida will be the official memory supplier for the console. The company has confirmed that it will commence the production of memory chips for PS3 in early 2005, in sufficient numbers to suggest the console's launch will take place in late 2005 or early 2006.

www.3dlabs.com/opengl2

Graphics for all

In the fast-moving world of computer graphics, the cross-platform OpenGL standard was falling behind the times. Now it seems a second coming is on the cards



It might not seem like much, though the news that 3Dlabs has released what it refers to as "a preliminary implementation of the OpenGL Shading Language" is big news for the non-Windows part of the PC graphics community.

For the past year, hardware programmability, that is allowing developers to take complete control of the huge processing power available via 3D cards, has been the hot industry buzzword. The rub is that it's only been available either via Microsoft's DirectX development interface or nVidia's proprietary Cg graphics programming language.

3Dlabs' release of the frontend OpenGL Shader Language compiler, together with that of supporting drivers for its Wildcat VP graphics cards, is the start of the rollout of that same functionality on an open-source basis however. Next up will be the full release of the OpenGL 2.0 standard, expected within six months to a year.

"The OpenGL Shading Language brings state-of-the-art programmability to any platform," enthuses **Neil Trevett**, 3Dlabs' senior vice president of market development. "It makes OpenGL a strong contender for games development for any platform, while non-Windows platforms, such as Apple and Linux, now have a graphics API [Application Programming Interface] with the latest in shader programmability."

The reason it's taken so long for OpenGL to support the new shader technology demonstrates both the weakness and the strength of the graphics standard. Established by Silicon Graphics as a general purpose graphics framework for use with operating systems including IRIX (its own workstation OS), Unix and Windows, its importance has been overshadowed, in the games world at least, by the rise of Microsoft's DirectX.

One reason for this, is that OpenGL is controlled by what's called the Architecture Review Board, or ARB. Consisting of various graphics companies, including some archrivals such as nVidia and ATI, and even at one point Microsoft, the ARB has never been able to advance OpenGL as fast as its proprietary rivals.

But to supporters such as Trevett, this decision-making by committee is the great advantage of OpenGL. "This is a good illustration of the careful and considered standardisation process at the OpenGL ARB – the industry gets to try out significant new functionality before it gets baked into the core OpenGL specification," he explains.

And this is what 3Dlabs means by a "preliminary implementation." The OpenGL Shading Language is available for developers to use and provide feedback on. This, in turn, will then be considered by the ARB, before the full OpenGL 2.0 specification is drawn up.

This approach, and the technology that results, have some high-profile advocates in the games development community. **John Carmack** has notably backed the emerging OpenGL 2.0 technology in *Doom III*. "If anything, I have been somewhat remiss in not pushing the issues as hard as I could with all the vendors. Now really is the critical time to start nailing things down. The decisions may stay with us for ten years," was his view on using the first OpenGL 2.0 extensions last year.

Support is bound to grow as ATI throws its weight behind the standard too. A long-time fan of OpenGL, the company, together with 3Dlabs, will be implementing the OpenGL Shading Language in its RenderMonkey development toolkit. A beta version should be available at the Siggraph graphics expo, while the long-term plan is to dissipate the technology as widely as possible by releasing the RenderMonkey source code to hardware vendors.

Measuring the contenders

OpenGL may be finally on the move with respect to its shading language, but that doesn't mean the competition is hanging around, waiting for it to catch up. Microsoft's version, the High Level Shading Language (HLSL), as used in DirectX, will be integrated into its new operating system, codenamed Longhorn, as a core component. This seems likely to further strengthen its position among Windows developers.

Meanwhile, nVidia's Cg programming language muddies the water in that it supports Windows, Mac OS and Linux development. Indeed, it has to compile down via either Microsoft's Direct3D (part of DirectX) or OpenGL to be used in any case. For this reason, some people in the industry think that Cg will transmute into a higher level tool, allowing shader programming standardisation to occur around either HLSL or OpenGL.



The release of the OpenGL Shading Language will enable non-Windows developers to gain full programmability over the latest graphics hardware for the first time. It should make it much easier to create in-game effects such as fractally-generated clouds, reflections, refractions and many other material surfaces





Lights, camera, action

www.virtualtvonline.com
www.legba.co.uk

Legba Studios' Virtual TV technology combines a film cameraman's interface with a high compression backend to open up a new gaming genre



This is what the interface of *Dinosaur Movie Director* looks likes, although it's obviously also combined with a wireframe view of the 3D environment

Considering the obvious jealousy many in the videogame industry seem to have for the lights, camera, action glitz of the movie industry, it's surprising that so few games have explored the boundaries. *Pokémon Snap*, *Fatal Frame* and the odd mission objective in *GoldenEye* played with the concept of still photography, while Lionhead's forthcoming game *The Movies* seems to be as overtly cinematic as it gets. But perhaps this is about to change.

Developed by veterans of the IT and graphics industries, Virtual TV (VTV) is a technology which brings film-making into games, literally. Simply put, it allows players to capture moving images and sound within any 3D rendered environment.

Using a firstperson perspective, budding Spielbergs get camera options such as pan and zoom, as well as the ability to set up camera movement using pre-set positions and dollies. Once the basic material is recorded, they can then edit the footage and add music or other audio to create a film.

"One key part of Virtual TV is that the size of the film is very small, which means people can swap them easily online," explains **Amy Mayer**, one of the co-founders of the company behind Virtual TV, Legba Studios, as well as being a trained camera-woman.

VTV files are compressed using what Legba refers to as its VMovie compression technology, which can reduce a one-minute film to between 50–200k. For better quality playback, for example on PC, the VTV files can also be exported to the standard MPEG format, where a typical 60-second VTV film would take up about 100k. "We think it's important gamers will be able to swap films with each other, whether on console or PC," says Mayer.

The initial implementation of the technology will be in Legba's own game, *Dinosaur Movie Director*, which is the first of half a dozen concepts the studio has in mind.

"*Dinosaur Movie Director* is aimed at the 8–15 age bracket but our other titles are aimed at many different types of gamers, from girls to dads and even hardcore gamers," Mayer reckons. Legba will also be making the technology available to thirdparties however. "We currently have a PC engine [called Extreme] available and we are working on a plug-in, the first version of which is likely to be available for use with RenderWare," Mayer reveals. There's the possibility for integration into existing engines too.

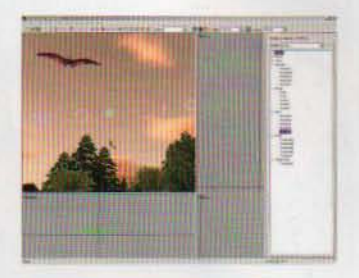
Another key enabler will be the release of tools for the community to set up and tweak their own environments. "We actively want to encourage the mod community and for that reason, are planning to release character and object exporters," Mayer says, adding, "I am really looking forward to the first time I see a film of Elvis being eaten by a T-Rex while reeling off a chorus of 'Suspicious Minds'."

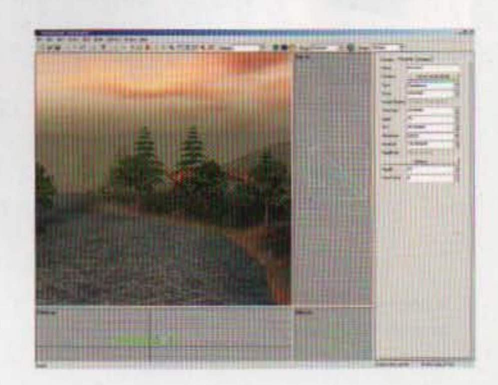
Studio system

As well as introducing the methods of the film industry into games, Legba is employing similar working practices in its business dealings too. Set up to develop technology and prototypes of game concepts, Legba won't be carrying out full-scale game production. The idea is to outsource projects, once signed to a publisher, to external studios and manage the technical and creative sides of the project alongside them.



Currently only available as a PC engine, VTV should be released in the form of a plug-in for Criterion's cross-platform RenderWare engine as well

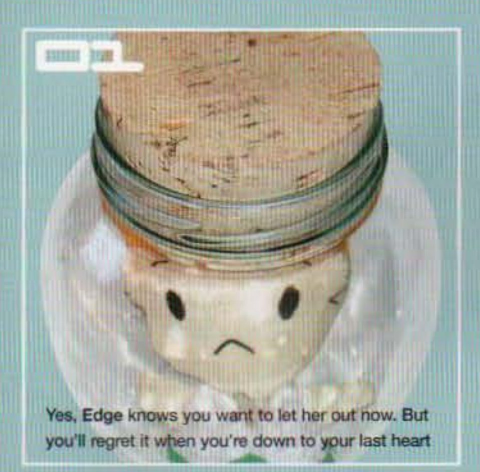




Part of the toolset for the Virtual TV is ExtremeEd, the level editor, which is currently being used to create Legba's first VTV game, *Dinosaur Movie Director*

OUT THERE

REPORTAGE



Yes, Edge knows you want to let her out now. But you'll regret it when you're down to your last heart



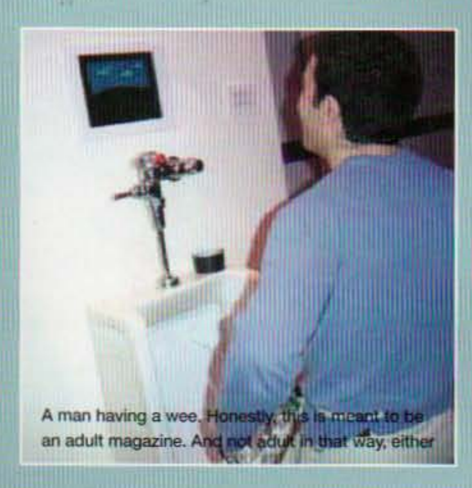
Neeklamy's domain. If there was any justice he'd be Santa Claus, and Miyamoto and Naka his elves



A golden rodent. Thinking about it, this story has the potential to lower Edge's tone like never before



And this picture isn't going to help. What to say? Something about sexual equality. Yes. That's it



A man having a wee. Honestly, this is meant to be an adult magazine. And not adult in that way, either



Ah, something technical. Piezo sensors analogue signal mylar membrane custom tuning ahhh

01 Genius in a bottle

UK: *The Legend of Zelda*'s graphical evolution has been heavily dissected since *The Wind Waker*'s release, but there's one thing in the game that delighted **Edge** that it hasn't seen mentioned anywhere before. Advances in processing power allow you to actually witness the discomfort on a fairy's face as Link stuffs her into a jar for his own personal (ab)use. It's a heartbreaking scene in the game – easily enough to make you rely on granny's steroid soup instead – and now you can tearfully recreate it in real life with Christopher Corbettis' stunning 'Fairy in a Bottle' plush. The 7.5cm-high toy comes in a glass bottle, firmly sealed with a cork that gives the frowning sprite no chance of escape. Corbettis' creations have featured in Out There before – check out his amazing *NiGHTS* creation in **E**110 – but this is surely his most brilliant (and brilliantly cute) work yet. Place your orders at www.neeklamy.com and be sure to stock up on them before you go and meet the boss.

02 Ur-inal fight

US: Ah, students. "The You're In Control project," reads a Webpage devoted to the MIT development, "is an effort to enhance the act of urination using computational technology." Which means, in layman's terms, that you get to play *Whack-a-Mole* using your wee. The system comprises a computer, a flatscreen monitor at head height, and a grid of piezoelectric ceramic buzzers mounted to a flexible Mylar membrane at the bottom of a urinal. During the game the player attempts to turn jumping hamsters yellow with their golden shower, which reminds **Edge** of some of the seedier Hamtaro fansites across the Internet. Each soaked rodent earns ten points, although **Edge** isn't quite sure it wants to know how you put your name into the high score table. Still, final proof that videogames really are pissing your life away. More information at www.monzy.org/urinecontrol

Soundbytes

"I look forward to returning as James Bond in *Everything or Nothing*. Playing the role in the interactive realm lets me bring my interpretation of the character to a new generation of Bond fans."
Pierce Brosnan, on reprising his film role for Electronic Arts' next visit to the Bond moneypit

"The ideals of an organisation can't change just because one person quits. The goals Team Ninja are striving for have not changed with this... people come together, fall away, and change over time, but they all look up to the same light of ideals."
Tecmo's Tomonobu Itagaki comments on rumours that the departure of one of his friends in Xbox thirdparty development will lead Tecmo to halt Xbox development

"The most talked-about game of the year took a major step towards retail availability as Agetec Inc today announced that *Magic Pengel: The Quest for Color* for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system has gone gold."
Well, **Edge** certainly hasn't discussed anything else since 2002 ticked over

03 Shock horror

US: It takes a very special kind of person to regard the Xbox controller as "not painful enough," but the world has one in **Kevin Rose**, associate producer at Tech TV and evidently something of a sado-masochist. See, not content with rigging up his own pad to send 20,000-volt pulses arcing through his left hand every time he's punched in *Mortal Kombat*, he's encouraging everyone else to do it too. Just his left hand? "You never want to split the ground/voltage between two hands," explains Rose. "If you do, the voltage runs through your heart, which is bad. As in really, really bad. It could stop your heart." Which is presumably the sort of thing Midway would love to use in its next ASA-baiting campaign, so let's not give it a chance, eh kids? Get more information at www.techtv.com, although **Edge** favours the cheaper (and safer) method of gluing drawing pins to the analogue sticks.

04 A room with a pew

Japan: You've just returned from Akihabara with a new game. You can't wait to load it up and be immersed in its 5.1 channels of intense, explosive aural ability. Except you can't. Your apartment is small, your walls are paper thin, your baby is sleeping in the next room and even if it weren't, your grandparents would object to the din anyway. Life in Tokyo can be cruel. Well, now thanks to Yamaha you can have your very own room. The MYR15 costs ¥380,000 (£2,007) and at $2m^2$ is large enough to house a desk (sold separately for ¥82,400 (£435)) and can even benefit from air conditioning. The units are being marketed to people wishing to find a feasible home cinema solution for their DVD/gaming fix.

05 Tecmo creates new moral panic

Japan: Readers offended by the cover of **Edge**'s girl issue (**E**121) might want to look away now. Not content with inflicting acres of naked digital female flesh on gamers, Tecmo has gone even further down the path of depravity by attempting to inflict actual female flesh on real-life beachgoers. At just $150 (£92), you too will be able to own a *Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* bikini, designed by Team Ninja and available in three different sizes (although the company's Website shamelessly describes them all as "teeny-weeny"). **Edge** just can't work out whether we're outraged or excited, and, more importantly, which size to go for. Though we have already decided on the Lamina version.

Data Stream 'End of an Era' Special

Year of Famicom's release: **1983**
Processor speed: **1.79MHz**
Display: **256 x 240**
Onscreen colours: **16 (from a possible 52)**
RAM: **2Kb**
First game: ***Donkey Kong***
Year of Famicom Disk System's release: **1985**
Capacity of FDS: **128k**
First FDS game: ***Legend of Zelda***
Year of Famicom's restyled re-release: **1993**
Number of games manufactured for Famicom: **around 1,200**
Last new game manufactured in: **1994**
Last Famicom manufactured: **2003**

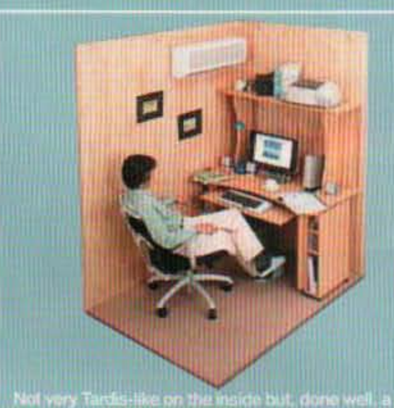


Don't know what to do with those batteries you don't need for your GBA? Tech TV proposes pain

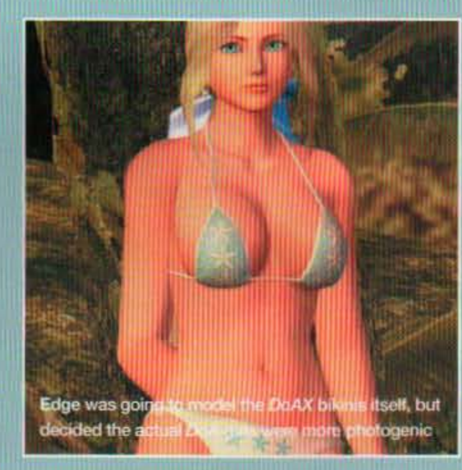

The finished pad. Next month, an add-on for the GameCube controller that steals your girlfriend

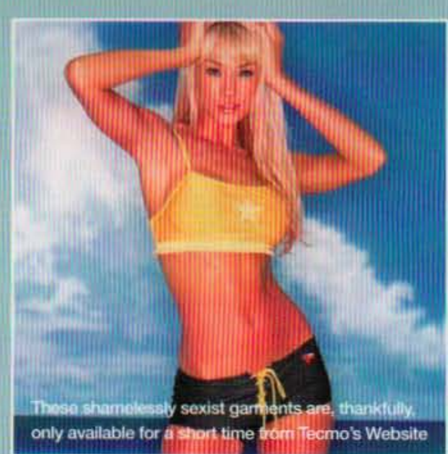


A room within a room: Yamaha's Tardis-like attempt at solving Japan's megacity residents' privacy woes


Not very Tardis-like on the inside but, done well, a claustrophobic setting can do wonders for creativity




Edge was going to model the *DoAX* bikinis itself, but decided the actual DoA girls were more photogenic


These shamelessly sexist garments are, thankfully, only available for a short time from Tecmo's Website



06



The PM 300 Sound Sytem. So-called because Tony Blair's a fan. **Edge** lies. It's PM Dawn. No, not really



Looks comfy, doesn't it? Of course, strap someone down, put Muse on, and it turns into a torture device

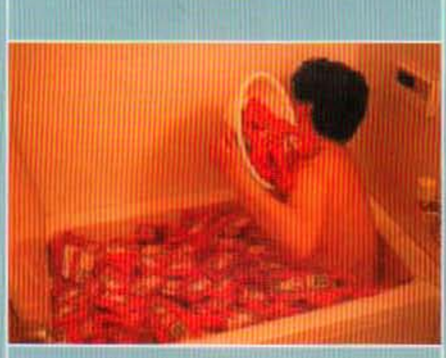


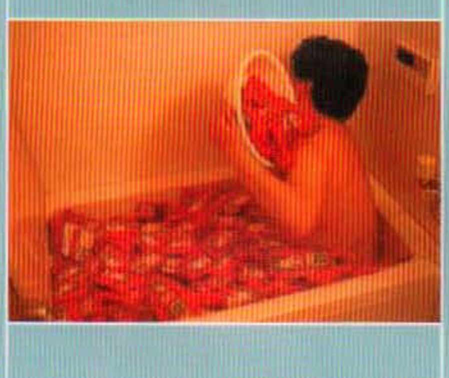
Websites are amazing, aren't they? When Edge were young, all this were fields of untamed bits and bytes

07



Pah, that's nothing. Edge is building the Tower of Babel out of finished copies of Dreamcast *Half-Life*...





... and then, when the magazine dies and the world ceases to exist, it'll be buried with them

08



The unit accommodates any wheel. Note the genuine Tillet racing kart seat (seen here in 'deluxe' version)



The GameRacer is so good it lets you play without the need for those unsightly cable connections

06 Solid shake

US: Unlike Kevin Rose (see Shock horror), if you find your thrills on the other side of the pleasure/pain principle, you might want to consider investing in Pyramat's PM 300. It looks a little bit like a sleeping roll, which it kind of is, a comfortable piece of furniture which encourages the player to lie back and relax. Napping, though, is out of the question, because the PM 300 contains three speakers (including a "four-inch woofer", apparently), sending every piece of sound vibrating through the player's body. Obviously it's a blissful experience with something like *Rez*, though **Edge** thinks the pleasures it offers are far outweighed by the potential hazards should the device ever fall into Rose's hands. The Pyramat PM 300 is $149 (£89) from www.jboyco.com

07 Those crazy Japanese!!!

Japan: It's been a question long on the team's hive mind. If **Edge** had just under 3,000 Famicom carts, what on Earth would it do with them? Or, more likely given the wealth of opportunity such a situation would present, what *couldn't* it do with them? Well, now **Edge**'s seven heads wonder no longer, thanks to the guidance of 'Mr Freetime', a Japanese man who has inexplicably amassed 2,967 of Jaleco's *Moero!! Pro Baseball*. Along the way to this fabulous collection he's taken photos illustrating what marvels the prospective cart hoarder can construct – The Fuji! The Ball Park! The Treasure Island! – thus providing the Internet with a fantastic curio (www.ne.jp/asahi/moe/pro/tokubetu.htm), and **Edge** with both peace of mind and a goal for the future. The magazine's 'Blue Peter'-style *Tengen Tetris* cart appeal begins here.

08 Who needs a coffee table?

UK: Now, **Edge** doesn't usually bother with this sort of thing, but then the majority of racing seat frames we've tried make our ageing backs hurt. Not so here. Designed by racing drivers, the GameRacer offers the perfect driving position, is utterly stable, foldable and fully adjustable, accommodating all shapes and sizes. More importantly, it massively enhances the virtual driving experience. Currently available for £169 (www.gameracer.co.uk).

Continue

Dr Wario
Like *Puyo Puyo* on pills. Literally!!!!!

Viewtiful Joe Japanese TV commercials
Snapshots of a superhero. View-ti-ful Joe!

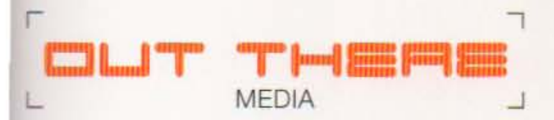
Ulala's comeback on GBA
Tiny up-down-left-right-chu-chu-chu!

Quit

The Famicom
Farewell, old pal. Don't forget your Powerglove

Internet game journalism
Post a rumour. Watch it grow...

Dentists
It's a cliché because it's true, you dolts



09 From Airline Reservations…

Despite the jaunting Sonic name-dropping in the title of Campbell-Kelly's history of the software industry, this isn't a populist history by any means. The author, an academic at the University of Warwick, nails his colours to the mast early in the preface. "I don't play videogames, and I dare say I never will," he reveals, with a seeming touch of pride. No matter, historians don't have to have personal affinity with their subject matter. And to be fair, games are only mentioned in passing anyway. Their inclusion in the title is more of a marketing matter.

Instead, the point of the book is to show something of the range of the software industry. Campbell-Kelly is particularly at pains to explain the relative unimportance of Microsoft in the big scheme of things. It might be the most valuable company in the world in terms of stock, but if it disappeared overnight, the corporate world would soon be able to replace its products. The same isn't true of complex business packages such as SAP's R/3 enterprise resource planning software or the database and other systems plumbing offered by the likes of Computer Associates and Oracle.

The other main advantage of the book's broadbrush approach is to provide a less deterministic view on those two saucy bedfellows, success and failure. Cleverer men than Bill Gates and Larry Ellison have built software empires and made their fortunes only to go spectacularly bust. Who remembers An Wang of Wang Laboratories these days, for example? As in the real world, so in that of ones and zeros; what goes up, must finally come down again.

10 Hacking the Xbox

The headlines must have been a nightmare for Microsoft – "MIT student hacks Xbox." Could things get any worse? How about that student, Andrew 'bunnie' Huang, publishing a 'How to…' guide? Surely time to call in the lawyers…

It's easy to get lost in the hype when it comes to hacking. It's certainly a hot issue in the US at the moment, thanks to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), which makes it illegal for non-academics to try to break copyright control technology. Indeed, this was the reason cited by Wiley, Huang's original publisher, for pulling out of the deal at the last minute, forcing him down the self-publishing route. Even MIT tried to use the act to stop him publishing the results of his extra-curricular activities. As Huang points out, he didn't get his PhD for hacking Xbox. (It was research into supercomputers architectures and he hasn't hacked the Xbox, rather reverse-engineered its encryption system.) In fact, the one company that seems to come out of the affair well is Microsoft, who sent Huang a "constructive, non-threatening letter," and have yet to call in the lawyers.

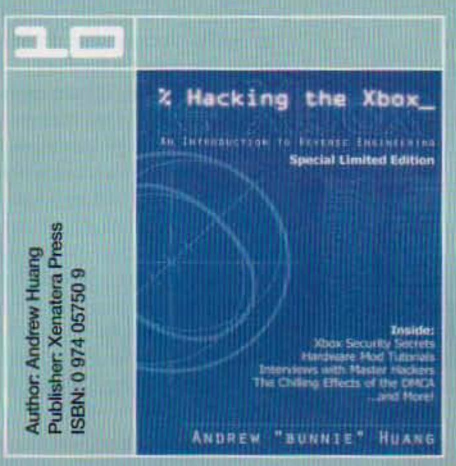
But to the guts. This is not a step-by-step book for the virgin hacker. If you can't build your own PCP diagnosis tools, don't even bother unscrewing the Xbox's case. Neither, however, is this a guide to running Linux on Xbox. Instead, it's a mixture of detailed technical analysis of Xbox, combined with brief interviews with hackers, thoughts on the legal ramifications as well as practical tips such as soldering techniques. It all makes for a fascinating, if sometimes complex, read.

09



Author: Martin Campbell-Kelly
Publisher: MIT
ISBN: 0 262 03303 8

10



Author: Andrew Huang
Publisher: Xenatera Press
ISBN: 0 974 05750 9

11



Site: **Dextrose**
URL: **www.dextrose.com**

11 Website of the month

They said it'd never happen, that the GameCube's proprietary disc format would make all hackers' efforts redundant. Of course, they said that about the Dreamcast, too – and sure enough, thanks to a smart hack using *PSO* and a broadband adapter, coders finally have unofficial code running on Nintendo's tiny toybox. The first game released, fittingly, was *Pong*, but **Edge** is sure more are on the way, and Dextrose has carried news on these developments right from the beginning. It also has a small-but-perfectly-formed forum community, eager to out-do each other with nuggets of system information. **Edge**'s favourite fact so far: that the header on the *Freeloader* disc contains the same information as Midway's *NHL Hitz*, effectively stopping Nintendo from blocking the disc in future Cube hardware releases.

12 Advertainment

Japan: Released in 1978, *Space Invaders* celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Taito has begun running an ad in preparation for the celebrations. Throughout the advert the game's all-too familiar soundtrack can be heard. But it's not the easiest advertainment to translate adequately.




Voiceover: "Question: In *Space Invaders* there was a difference in the scrolling speed of the invaders…




… which was faster: left to right, or right to left?"



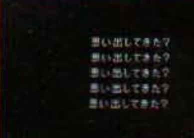

"The answer is the right side – people are used to reading from left to right."




"So they can react faster."

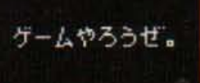



"What about playing smartly?"




(Message: "Do you remember?")





(Message: "Brothers… let's play videogames.")

The alarm goes off one hour too late, the lazy pupils beneath the heavy eyelids skip a glance to the blinking liquid crystal display, and there is a beat of horror. Five seconds later the stereo is up full blast, and RedEye is tearing around the house trying to get ready. "If man is five," sings Frank Black, and a panicked RedEye murmurs along, hurriedly pulling a t-shirt over his head – man is five, man is five – "Then the devil is six." Trousers. Where are RedEye's trousers? "And if the devil is six," RedEye's singing louder now, devil is six, devil is six – trousers, there they are, "Then God is seven," Shouting! Then God is seven! Then God is seven! And that, thinks RedEye in a distracted moment as both his legs go through the same trouser leg and he falls flat on his face, explains *Wario Ware*'s mark in **Edge**.

"Ouch," says RedEye, face down in the most undignified pose he's been in since that visit to the hospital after the mix-up with the *Rez* vibrator pack. But one swift movement sees him roll onto his back, hitch up his pants, and head off to the bathroom. The tooth-brushing minigame is instantly recognisable. Brush! Seven seconds of left-right-left-right-left-right. The Dentist wouldn't be happy, of course, but she's not here, more's the pity. Shave! Avoid lacerating face! Failed! One life gone, three left. Next task!

Wario Ware's emergence into gaming's harsh mid-morning light is as unexpected as that late alarm call, but it couldn't have happened at a more apposite time. And, just like RedEye's alarm – which calls him to an interview that will pay for this month's adventures – it has come in the nick of time, but may end in glorious failure.

History lesson. Handheld gaming began with the Game&Watch. They were simple things, offering binary shadows for the player to dance in. If you tilted the screen to the light, you could see those patterns, grey shapes ready to be blacked in by the clockwork CPU. If you pressed your thumb on the screen, the liquid crystal would kaleidoscope and dance. It invited you to press harder. Press too hard, and it would crack.

Of course, RedEye never did, because he was in love with his – some rip-off of *Pole Position* imported from the far east. He still has it, somewhere. You had three lanes to move in, and you could move from left to right. Other cars would appear in the middle distance, then jerk step by step towards you. You had to get out of their way. "Bip," said the machine as everything incremented one step up the unending highway. "Bip, bip, bip." And then right at the peak, proper zone gaming, thrilling to the rhythm of the bipibipbipbipbipbipbip. But why can he hear that now? Shit, shit, SHIT, that's RedEye's phone alarm and that means he's got two minutes to be at the bus stop which is 210 seconds from where he is now, running with his coat and bag trailing behind.

Quick game. Exit the building! RedEye jumps down the last eight stairs without banging his head on the ceiling, then maintains that momentum, twisting the door open and spinning onto the street. Done. Quick game. Avoid the people on the street! RedEye tears down the road, ducks left. Left, right, left, drop the shoulder and done! Quick game. Make it to the bus before that old woman picks up her change from the floor just by the driver and the bus accelerates, off and away and you're left there standing. RedEye hammers his internal A and B buttons like *Track 'n' Field*'s back in vogue. He makes it. Done.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Quick game. Write a column of 1200 words. Done!

> **"Wario Ware isn't just a tribute; it's also a commentary, a distillation of the past, present and future of videogame mechanics"**

And, as he flashes his travelcard and staggers up the aisle to collapse on a seat at the back, his slightly-more-together brain considers that *Wario Ware* isn't just a tribute; it's also a commentary, a distillation of the past, present and future of videogame mechanics. In the *Wario Ware* version of *F-Zero* you steer left and right and avoid things, bip, bip; in the full version of *F-Zero* you steer left and right and avoid. And it doesn't matter how much Nagoshi-san adds to *F-Zero X*, that's what the game will always be. More inertia, more powerups, more dizzying bends and fancy flashes, but always left, right and avoid the oncoming traffic. It's kind of depressing if you think about it, so RedEye doesn't, too hard at least.

Instead, he leans back, pulls his SP out of his front pocket, and thinks about handheld evolution. The pocket LCD market was killed when the Game Boy arrived, because the cartridge based-device was such an obvious evolutionary leap over the fixed thrills on the single shot Game&Watch. Games were no longer limited to a set pattern of hand-drawn characters, but joined the consoles in the age of the pixel. And that let developers produce a different sort of game on the system, a game more like those that people played at home. A new form of mobile entertainment, to sit alongside the simple single-screen thrills of old. What could be better than diversity?

Except it wasn't diversity, it was genocide. As developers felt out the capabilities of the Game Boy, so the games increased in scale and scope. Bigger and bigger carts facilitated still larger adventures, and then upscale hardware modifications brought the games closer to their console counterparts. The sort of simple, repetitive games that had birthed the handheld industry were limited to shoddy retro collections, marketed at rip-off prices and selling in handfuls. And hey, said the magazines, rightly so. They called them throwaway, and readers stopped buying them.

But the magazines were wrong. The type of game favoured by the manufacturers of LCD games might have been created out of hardware limitations, but it was a valid, unsophisticated form of entertainment which still has a place today. *Wario Ware* is its born-again champion: RedEye starts a game of Paper Plane, and wham, it's over in a couple of minutes. Time for another, perhaps Pyoro, and again, two minutes and RedEye's done. So's the bus journey, and RedEye hops off and runs for his train, flicking the screen of his GBA closed and stuffing it back into his jeans.

Bite-sized gaming for those who don't have time for a full meal, RedEye declares *Wario Ware* as the most important game of the year so far, and, as he tears towards the train that won't leave until just after he's hopped on board, he hopes that it's as successful as the wake-up call that began this story.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with **Edge**'s

News just in: *Chess 2*, the sequel to the popular turn-based strategy boardgame, has been released across all formats. To increase the thrill of combat, the developer has introduced a new piece, the Spin Doctor, which can change its move at every turn. The queen's bishop of both sides has finally come out as a gay bishop, introducing a graceful arc to the previously straight diagonals on which it operated. Extending the field of battle beyond the simplistic 8 x 8 grid of the original, *Chess 2* now comes with 50 new built-in maps with terrain features and weather. And that most humble of pieces, the pawn, is now equipped with a laser cannon. Says the developer, "Popular as it was, *Chess* needed to be updated for a contemporary, hardcore audience."

Such would run one kind of satirical comparison between the Royal Game and today's sequel-happy videogame industry. But chess as we know it today is already in fact a kind of multiple sequel. Before most aspects of the modern game solidified in 1475, the queen was one of the weakest pieces, and she herself had been a replacement for the fers, a minor medieval piece which in turn had supplanted the Arabic firzan. The rule changes of 1475 had a revolutionary effect: almost all the endgame theory that had been acquired during the previous 900 years became obsolete overnight.

We are already, in effect, playing *Chess 2.0*, a sequel with extraordinary staying power. Many new versions of chess have since been proposed – from 3D chess as seen on the bridge of the Starship Enterprise, to 'Fischerrandom Chess', a variant invented by ex-world champion and latterday paranoid anti-Semite Bobby Fischer, in which the starting positions of the pieces are shuffled randomly, so as to negate the effect of memorised opening theory. But none has supplanted the five-century-old standard game.

This brief history of chess's evolution, then, poses the pertinent question to our pastime of electronic entertainment: when is a sequel a true improvement of its predecessor, as with the new chess of 1475, and when does it, contrarily, betray the balance and beauty of the original, as in my facetious chess sequel? I have been thinking about this problem while playing two very different sequels: *Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising* and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness*.

Core Design, it must be noted, has no lack of experience in making sequels. There was a certain logic to each PlayStation iteration of the *Tomb Raider* franchise, as Lara acquired new abilities to complement the ones we were familiar with, and as environments became more ambitious. On the other hand, there was a clear law of diminishing returns in operation, as levels became too sprawling and unforgiving, and increasingly riddled with incoherencies, to keep the attention of all but the most hardened ponytail fetishists. I still consider that *Tomb Raider 2*, however, was one of the best videogame sequels ever made: it retained the virtues of the original while expanding the environmental and dynamic palette considerably.

For all their increasing sins, each subsequent *Tomb Raider* sequel at least knew at heart what the core virtues of the game were: environmental awe, and the pleasure of learning to take precise, fluid control over Lara's complex acrobatics. The first thing you notice, then, about *Angel of Darkness* is that the broken control system – the most unresponsive and woolly in recent memory – has eliminated that second virtue entirely. Oops.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Does 'onwards' always mean 'upwards'?

"You can see the problem for developers. It is an irresistible proposition to try to profit from the success of one game by making an 'improved' version"

Add to this insult the incompetent voice-acting, a feast of visual glitches, and the dismaying 'physical upgrade' system (a perfect example of level design through arbitrary limitation of player action), and you have a sequel that, despite flashes of architectural splendour and an excellent orchestral score, is inferior to every other game in the series.

Advance Wars 2, thankfully, poses subtler problems, and yet it may still be wondered whether it is in fact a coherent step forward from the first game. (*Advance Wars* itself of course was a sequel, being the sixth in a series stretching back to 1988's *Famicom Wars*, but for most of its audience it will have been the first experienced.) One of the touches of deadpan comedy I loved about *AW* was the moment where you met a huge new type of tank that could more or less obliterate anything in its path – only to learn that it was called, with beautiful understatement, a Medium Tank. In *Advance Wars 2*, however, we have the Neotank, which outguns its predecessor, and so the Medium Tank is now just – well, medium. Moreover, the Neotank could obviously not be made too powerful, or the balance between units would have been ruined, and so it is not as scary or impressive an addition to the arsenal as it might have been. The same is true of the Missile Silos, which are fun to use but seem to have been made artificially puny – taking only three hitpoints from affected units – in order not to wreck the context.

And finally, it is a mystery of gameworld logic why aircraft cannot fly over pipes. It's true that all you really need to know is that pipes function symbolically to subdivide the map (*Advance Wars* is at base a brilliant example of satisfyingly rich symbolic interaction, much like chess itself), yet it must be accounted a slight blot on the sequel's consistency that pipes are the only gameworld structure that does not have a recognisable realworld analogue. (Surely we are not really meant to envisage pipes that are 30,000 feet tall.) In sum, though I am blissfully hooked on *Advance Wars 2*, I must conclude that it is not quite as beautifully pure a success as its predecessor.

You can see the problem for developers. Since chess was not a commercial product but a gift to humanity, there was no money to be made from 'upgrading' it. But it is an irresistible proposition to try to profit from the success of one game by making an 'improved' version. *Advance Wars 2* is an outstanding product compared to the mass of videogame sequels that are bug-fixes, resolution enhancements or mission packs; but the problem for Intelligent Systems was that in the first *Advance Wars* they had produced the videogame equivalent of the 1475 version of chess: a decisive refinement of its predecessors that resulted in a game which was, essentially, unimprovable.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: steven_poole@mac.com

A few days ago, I went to an arcade. I haven't done that for a while. There are many of these across Tokyo, but this one was in Shinjuku. What were my first impressions? Well, immediately: Namco's *Taiko No Tatsujin* is really, really popular. Couples seemed to be enjoying themselves playing that. As well as that, there are still lots of those popular *Purikura – Print Club*, if you prefer – machines, where you can take your picture and print it out. There were high school girls having a lot of fun, taking tons of pictures of themselves and their friends. Mmm… I can recommend these kinds of attractions to everybody, particularly female users, but they don't really appeal to me. I looked around for something else, and saw dozens of *Virtua Striker* cabinets lined up. Not just the newest version, either, but old versions too. Now, like I said before, I don't go to the arcade much anymore but when I see my games I always have the desire to play them. "Mmm," I thought, "let's have a little fun."

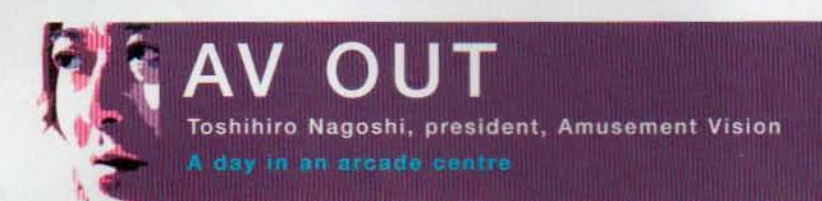
I strolled up to a machine, and pressed the twoplayer button. In Japan, twoplayer machines are 'versus' cabinets, two machines back to back, so you cannot see who you're playing. But before I sat down, I stole a quick glance around the side of the machine at my adversary's face. He looked like a kid. And… damn! He was also looking at me. Our eyes met. Stuck for anything else to do, we both smiled. The smiles said the same thing: "There's no way I'll lose this game." But I was sure I wouldn't. I mean, I made this game after all. And anyway, I'm a game producer. My pride was at stake here, and there was no more time to be worried, because the match was about to begin.

The game started. Everything was going too fast. After, oh, no more than ten seconds, he got the first goal. And then he got another. And another. And so on, until I found myself thinking, "I'm in serious trouble." And then, "Argh, I'm in a total mess!" At six-nil down, an observer could draw no other conclusion than that my efforts were a total disaster. Still, I wasn't done yet, and we were about to start what I had decided would be a new beginning. The revenge match.

Well, you can probably guess what happened next. Again, I was defeated. I don't have the words to describe how I felt. We played again – we played three more times, in fact – and each time I lost by more than five goals. At this point, I decided to take a little rest. I stood up and, as I left the machine seat, I took another look at my opponent on the machine with its back to mine. He was smiling at me, and I felt completely helpless. What could I do? And then, in my greatest moment of despair, I had an idea.

I made a telephone call. To whom? I called a programmer, who was at the same time supervising an *F-Zero AX* location test in Shinjuku. He was one of the development team members of *Virtua Striker*. I explained to him the way I lost all my games and told him how my opponent was moving onscreen. He listened patiently, then gave me some pieces of advice to counter the player's behaviour.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

A day in an arcade centre

"Of course! Why didn't I think of that?" I replied. "Okay, I'm going to go and try that right now." Off I went, back to the same seat as before, to the same opponent, and confidently started a versus game. I suffered a succession of terrible defeats.

So, once more, I called my programmer friend over at the location test. He gave me even more detailed advice, explained advanced tactics and expert techniques. Then, closing the conversation, he gave me a rallying speech. He told me to hold my head up high, to carry on, to believe in myself as if I was about to go to war. So I did. And… again, I was unable to defeat my nemesis, with no more success than I had right at the very start.

Again, yes, again, I called the friend who'd tried to inspire me moments before. He said, "Wow, is that for real? He is one hell of player! Okay, then let's have a different approach to the problem." He gave me new tactics, moves and techniques. I have to say, I was not particularly eager to go back to the cabinet this time, but I felt it was my duty. Surprise: again, it ended in failure. I didn't call my friend back. Unfortunately, he called me. "Hey, how's it going?" he asked. "Did you win?"

"No," I replied. "And I'm fed up with this game so I'm giving up. It's hopeless."

This person replied, with some surprise. "What? What are you doing? Where are you? Shinjuku, right? I'm coming in few minutes." Although I wasn't in the best mood by this time, I decided to wait. He arrived, pumped up, and noticing my expression, he said "Come on, it is not yet time to give up. Where is the man? At this cabinet? Okay, I see him. Let's go there, together." Within a few seconds, a new series of matches started. I was at the control deck, but this time I had the programmer behind me, directing my play and telling me how to react. "Jesus, I'm so ashamed," I thought. But he had come all this way to help me, so I couldn't really tell him to go away.

"I don't go to the arcade much anymore but when I see my games I always want to play them. 'Mmm,' I thought, 'let's have a little fun…'"

Anyway, back to the big match. I did exactly what my 'coach' was telling me to do and then, wonder of wonders… I won. I mean I actually defeated the player, the guy who'd made my afternoon so depressing. After that, I won again, this time with a gap of three goals. My coach was as delighted as me. I stood up and, of course, took one final look at my adversary. He'd changed from the child to a 30-year-old salaryman. "Oops," I thought. But I decided not to mention the minor detail to my coach. Why spoil the moment?

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Ahh... online gaming, how I've tried to love ye. Really tried. But you're just not doing it for me. It's not like I didn't want to. I mean, those bigger boys always said you would, y'know, show me a good time. The sorry fact is, on the occasions when I have taken the plunge, and invited you to woo me, I've come away disappointed and flaccid. No matter how hard I pump my enthusiasm gland, the most I can muster is a tiny dribble of interest from my curiosity duct. Meanwhile, my apathy anus is working overtime, pumping out a stream of rancid fumes, accompanied by an undulating, organic hiss.

While most of the above may have been unnecessarily graphic, it's considerably less ghastly than the prospect of game studios blowing half their budgets on online components, when often the singleplayer game could have benefited from a little more attention. These days it feels like every time I read an interview with a developer, or a preview, or

You can almost picture them, mocking all us like-minded saps, as we get our add-on disk home, load it up, and find a token couple of bonus singleplayer levels, and a billion farting, cough-stained, cuk-flustered multiplayer maps. Why do they do this? Because they hate us, and because they need to fund their appalling cocaine habits, and pay their manservants' wages, and stuff (it's a common misconception that the average developer is anything other than an arrogant multi-millionaire, who spends his weekends throwing darts at paupers from the driving seat of his Ferrari Tediosa).

What I'm saying is this: it has long been a concern of mine that the majority of gamers do not share the gaming world's enthusiasm for online. Naturally, I'm at risk of spiting my own column here. After all, **Edge** is nothing if not enthusiastic about the online future. But then, **Edge** caters to the elite. If you listen to the industry harp on, they'll tell you that

networks, like the ones that developers and journalists have. We can go online! We can fire-up our modems, and stride purposefully onto the Internet to meet others of our ilk. For we are united. For we enjoy nothing more than to demonstrate our silky skills before strangers. And afterwards, in the communal showers-cum-chatroom, we shall boast of our gaming prowess as we scrub the sweat-burns from our grubby bits. Pff... No, ta.

See, you buggers, I DON'T WANT TO DO THAT. I've tried it, loathed it, and I won't be going back. If I want to play multiplayer games, I'll do it in front of a single telly, with people I know. Not anonymous, solitary, fudge-coasters. Online gaming is not for me, no matter how much you tell me that it is, and you're not – you're simply NOT – going to woo the majority of people in the way that you think you are. Certainly not with the types of online games you're pumping out at the moment.



BIFFOVISION

Page 28, press hold, and reveal. 'Digitiser's founder speaks out

Mr Biffo likes playing by himself

anything, 77.3 per cent of the focus is online. I could be wrong – after all, the mediocre *SOCOM Navy Seals* hasn't done too badly on the PS2 (never underestimate the lure of a free headset), but for every PS2 owner who's bouncing up and down at the prospect of an online future, I'm betting there are six who are left scratching their beards. And by 'scratching' I mean 'weeping', and by 'their beards' I mean 'softly into a copy of 'Official PlayStation2 Magazine', mouthing, "why has this happened?"'

There was a time when the likes of me could safely ignore online gaming. When it was confined to the PC. Alas, now that online Xbox and PlayStation2 games are fast becoming ubiquitous, they're threatening my very reason for playing games in the first place. Fact is, I like playing games by myself, and I don't necessarily want to share my hobby with anyone else. I like pretending to be a spy, or a plumber, or a large-chested woman in private, thanks. It's like being a happily closeted transvestite at a time when transvestism is sweeping the land, and the cover of every magazine is proclaiming cross-dressing to be bigger than disco dancing.

But it's not just console gaming that is being buggered by Onlinitis; PC expansion packs are getting lazier, as developers eschew expensive singleplayer missions, in favour of cheap and easy multiplayer maps. And still charging us a penny short of £20 for the privilege.

everyone who plays games – from Daddy Old, to Chicken Little – is going to be playing online within the next three weeks, and loving every second of it.

At the risk of browning my own trumpet I've been pretty spot on at predicting gaming trends in the past. That's because I'm great, of course. But it's also because I'm pretty much your average gamer-on-the-street, and what I don't like is all too often echoed by the majority.

I love my games, but I'm not one of the hardcore elite. In fact, I'm even something of a technophobe, and have to phone my father to come round and programme the toaster. Of course the gaming press and industry creatives are excited at the prospect of online gaming; they're hardcore boys to a man. I'm just not yet convinced that online multiplayer gaming will ever be a mainstream pursuit in the way we're continually being told it will be. And when I say 'continually', I literally mean 'all the time'.

See, like many people, I don't have a huge network of PCs at home. And even if I did, few of my chums are gamers (some are already dead, others outside, dying in that rusting trough... the rest simply too drugged to even hold a joypad). Oh, but of course – we home-style gamers do not need

"Online games are threatening my very reason for playing games in the first place. I like playing games by myself, and I don't want to share my hobby"

What online gaming really needs is a *Sims*. Not *The Sims Online*, because that was embarrassing. But something like *The Sims* that appeals to people across the board; young girls, students, old women, beardy sci-fi fans who can download indistinct skins of someone that looks a bit like a naked Willow from 'Buffy', and then lock them in a room with no doors, or toilet, and smile as they slowly urinate themselves to death. Violence, action games, RPGs – these aren't going to cut it. They're merely going to appeal to the 14-year-old boy that resides in the likes of us. And, unless something dreadful is occurring, not everyone has a 14-year-old boy inside them.

Here's an idea, though; the reality is that humans are dirty, and the video industry and the Internet only became massmarket entities when people realised that it made access to porn easier than ever. Perhaps somebody needs to take the plunge and splice sex to online gaming, and then everyone will attend the party. Except appalled Christians. But who wants to play *Unreal Sex-Bollocks Tournament* against those deluded saps anyway?

Mr Biffo is a semi-retired videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Edge's most wanted

Midway Arcade Treasures

It's what the PS2 has been waiting for: *Gauntlet*, *Paperboy*, *Toobin'*, *Rampart*, *Marble Madness*, *Joust* et al. Chip smells and cigarette smoke not included.



(PlayStation2) Midway

Sega AGES 2500: Monaco Grand Prix

One of the first releases for Sega's latest retro affair, *Monaco GP* opts for a near-topdown perspective rather than the expected in-car option. Could be fun.



(PlayStation2) 3D-Ages

Ninja Gaiden

Edge hasn't seen any more of *Ninja Gaiden* since its demonstration at E3, but it's impossible to not get excited, in spite of Tecmo's reluctance to show it off.



(Xbox) Tecmo

OutRun2

Improved visuals are fine as long as the purity of the original's gameplay has been retained. No one's played it yet, so no-one knows. But soon we will.

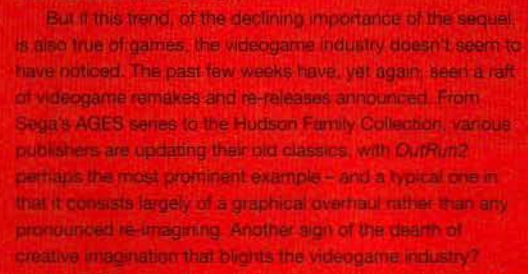


(arcade) Sega

Licences & remakes: The Sequel

The return of the thorny issue of money for old rope

Hollywood's movie moguls have had to contend with a rather worrying development in recent months. It would appear that movie sequels are not, financially, what they once were. They no longer represent guaranteed income in the way that they did throughout the late '80s and early '90s: 'Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle' is far from unique in delivering less revenue over its opening weekend than its direct predecessor did. One consequence of the decline of the movie sequel, to judge by this year's E3, is the film industry's eager willingness to diversify into the lucrative world of videogame spin-offs. (Indeed documents that came to light during the recent divorce of Larry Wachowski show in graphic detail exactly how lucrative these can be.)



But if this trend, of the declining importance of the sequel, is also true of games, the videogame industry doesn't seem to have noticed. The past few weeks have, yet again, seen a raft of videogame remakes and re-releases announced. From Sega's AGES series to the Hudson Family Collection, various publishers are updating their old classics, with *OutRun2* perhaps the most prominent example – and a typical one in that it consists largely of a graphical overhaul rather than any pronounced re-imagining. Another sign of the dearth of creative imagination that blights the videogame industry?

Not necessarily. One of the most promising things about the latest round of retro re-packaging is that the whiff of a lazy cash-in is actually fairly scarce. Take *Midway Arcade Treasures*. Not only does it pack in over 20 games, compared to the typical four or five for such a retro round-up, it also includes a host of DVD extras, including interviews with the games' original creators. Such a celebration of gaming's past should hardly be sneered at, particularly by a generation that wasn't around to experience these games firsthand.

What these polished updates demonstrate is that, at their best, these sorts of throwbacks and belated sequels offer publishers an opportunity to celebrate their heritage even in spite of the rapid obsolescence of gaming technology, introducing their legacy to a new generation of gamers in the process. It's hardly cynical to seek to turn it into a revenue stream as well, and it's infinitely preferable to the corporate governance responsible for the likes of movie-licensed tat like *Enter the Matrix*, *Charlie's Angels*, or *Hulk*.


032


034


036


040




041



OutRun2 (working title)

Remember walking into an arcade in 1986 and being dazed by OutRun's bi-linear parallax scrolling? **Edge** has been waiting for the sequel ever since



Expect Ferrari's main cabriolet models (328GTS, F40, 360 Spider, etc) to be included. A new six-speed gearbox has been fitted along with a variety of view options in keeping with other Sega arcade racing titles

Seventeen years. That's how long it's taken Sega-AM2 to unveil the follow-up to one of the greatest racing games of all time. (Ignore *Turbo OutRun* and *OutRunners* (and don't even mentioned *Battle OutRun* or *OutRun Europa*) – they're brand extensions, not genuine follow-ups.)

This is not nostalgia. *OutRun* remains one of the most playable and consistently rewarding racers around. True, there are faster and technically superior games yet, other than *Burnout 2*, no racing title has managed to come anywhere near to capturing the essence of the original *OutRun*. It's something that extends far beyond the game's rustic (though arguably undated) graphics, the brainless comportment of the traffic, or the shockingly simplistic handling dynamic.

And it's the very thing **Edge** is hoping has been carried across to *OutRun2*. So far things look encouraging. The OutRun mode offers the same progressive 15-stage structure of the original game, complete with the end-of-stage road fork and relentless time limit restrictions. The handling is again uncomplicated, with drifts now induced by straightforward on-off-on throttle application. Essentially it's *OutRun* with updated graphics.

Naturally, there are additions. Time Attack mode attempts to furnish players with a password to input online as part of a nationwide ranking competition while a Versus option allows four individuals to race each other to one of the game's five endings. Other players' cars appear in ghost form on your screen and only the leader gets to decide the route, which could prove to be an interesting supplementary tactical element.

Particularly intriguing is the Quest mode. Here the focus is your passenger, or rather, her mood. Drive in accordance to your lady's expectations (ie fast and without crashing) and a heart gauge fills up. Depending on its level the game's end sequences change.

That's more or less it in terms of currently available information. The game runs on the Chihiro arcade board, which has led to speculation (and in some cases, outright – though misguided – assertion) that the game is coming to Xbox. A technically centric viewpoint would support this, of course, but **Edge** is wearing its commercial hat today and so a PS2 version seems assured.

What is certain is that nothing is certain. If EA still holds the console rights to Ferrari road cars then that would complicate matters – **Edge** sources suggest that Sega-AM2 currently has no plans to convert the title itself, and would consider outsourcing this to a thirdparty.

The wait, therefore, continues.

Passione rossa

According to Japanese gaming folklore, Sega released the original *OutRun* without obtaining the Ferrari licence for the game's main protagonist – the 1984 Ferrari Testarossa. (This explains the hideous makeover the car suffered in the *Shenmue II* version of the game.)

This time Sega-AM2 has the official licence and a number of the Scuderia's road models are included. The actual total isn't currently known but they'll all be cabriolet versions which narrows it down a little. Among others, spotted in these shots are a Dino 246GTS, an F50 and, yes, a Testarossa.

Ferrari
OFFICIAL LICENSED PRODUCT
Original Game ©SEGA ©SEGA-AM2/SEGA, 2003

Format: Arcade
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega-AM2
Origin: Japan
Release: Winter











What about the music? Expect remixed versions of the original tracks, not unlike the arranged versions found on the *OutRun* soundtrack CD. Not that **Edge** has the disc and drives to work listening to 'Splash Wave' or anything

Pillage

A time will come when humans live as gypsies, without cars, cities, stats or icons. Zed Two puts the finishing touches to its turn-based rebellion





The story follows Low as he leads a rebellion against the comical but omnipotent aliens who have reduced humanity to a terrified nomadic existence





Level playing field

Although the basic pattern of combat remains constant throughout the game, Zed Two has taken every opportunity to mix things up. Teams consist of up to five of the nine characters available, and the seasons change in familiar locations as the story progresses. Of the 19 levels some are rescues, while others simply require you to survive. One set-piece requires one character to set explosives while the others hold off attackers. With impeccable logic, the following level is a timed escape, as you try to outrun the big bang.

Familiarity breeds, all too often, not contempt but blindness. Players schooled over the years in the peculiarities of the RPG and turn-based strategy genres have become oblivious to their foibles. Zed Two has done its best to imagine a world without them.

The rhythm of the game is familiar from its 2D forebears. Each character in turn can move, attack and move again. Although each has a limited movement range per turn, the numbers are as thoroughly hidden as they are throughout the game. Rather than counting down the number of steps, each player has total freedom of movement within the area described by a glowing dotted line. The more you move before attacking, however, the smaller the range available to you after. Time constraints have been abandoned, accommodating both chin-strokers and sprint-finishers.

The slick, ring-based menu (the game's RPG inspirations showing once again) brings up the options of shielding or healing after a move has been completed. Both come at a price – shielding drastically limits movement on the next turn, and healing leaves you desperately vulnerable to any attack.

Weapons are split into two categories, determined by their targeting mechanism. Line-of-sight weapons have a fat, wandering reticule. Pick your spot, and then fine-tune the direction and power of the shot by stopping two moving hairlines. Ballistic shots require a top-down view, with the equivalent of a sonar screen projected on top of the map. It's not a joyless test of twitchy skill, more like getting to take a sip at a fruit machine in the middle of every go.

But beyond these two weapon types blossoms a whole range of possibilities. As well as the expected mines and cluster bombs, some characters evolve powers which radically alter playing patterns. The healing beam works just as well on enemies as team-mates, so careful aiming is crucial. Later in the game, it's possible to bounce shots off shielded team-mates, who deflect them towards enemies out of sight of the firer.

Indeed, the game's whole mechanic is centred on line of sight. The aliens have no foreknowledge of the location of your team of rebels, or even of their presence. Only on seeing you are they alerted to the threat you pose. However, they can then pass on this information to any other aliens within their lines of sight, who in turn can do the same. This allows them to deploy chains of spotters to relay your position back to, say, a catapult hidden and protected behind a high wall.

"It's not a joyless test of twitchy skill, more like getting to take a sip at a fruit machine in the middle of every go"

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC, PC**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Zed Two**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**111









To even things up, it is possible to see which team members each alien knows the location of, and data transmitted between them shows up as a stream of bright dots. This allows players to sneak team-mates round the back of an attacking force, or lure them into range of a hidden fighter. The deformable landscape plays its part, since the huge craters opened up disrupt the alien's signals. The player, however, has the advantage of a free camera mode, allowing the map to be examined from every angle.

Zed Two has also invested thought into the difference in dynamic between single and multiplayer games. The block interleaving of the singleplayer game, where the player moves all his characters before the AI does the same was considered too monolithic for live opponents. Instead, players move turn-about, upping the speed and changing the tactics of play. But should that not be to your taste, customisation options are provided.

Although online play should be straightforward to implement, concrete console plans are yet to be made. However, PC players are able to take indulge in elegant turn-about email battles. Each set of moves, along with any commentary, is delivered as a tiny attachment. The recipient runs the attachment, watches the destruction unfold and then returns the favour. Old fashioned, but functional.

Zed Two remains unable to announce a publisher at this stage. *Pillage* was conceived to strip two of the more esoteric and alienating game genres of their specialised ticks and traits. It must be frustrating that by making a game which is accessible to all – including non-gamers (crucial for a really successful party game), children and turn-based haters – it has sacrificed the easily pigeon-holed but limited market which many publishers seem to favour.



Characterisation in *Pillage* is highly detailed. As Low, the game's hero, grows throughout his battles he inherits the same range of weaponry and abilities that his father exhibits at the outset

Metal Arms: Glitch in the System

Oi, robot! Swingin' Ape proposes three new laws for its thirdperson android shooter: compatibility, coherence and comedy



Glitch isn't always working solo. Some missions find you sweeping into town with a couple of compatriots. You have no direct control over them, but their presence produces a surprisingly strong sense of camaraderie



Morally speaking, robots might just be the new aliens. Green blood and buckshee limbs have always given players licence to maim with a clear conscience, but faced with an army of robots – and evil robots at that – any vestige of reserve can be abandoned. And as Glitch, the only decent robot left in Droid City, it's your responsibility to destroy everything you meet.

Controls are considerately efficient. Move with the left stick, look with the right, triggers on the shoulder buttons. Weapon select buttons can be tapped for a quick reload or held to pause the action and cycle through the options. Elegant on the PS2 and Xbox pads, there is a risk of the scheme feeling a little less balanced on the GameCube. Glitch is billed as weighing half a ton, but he moves as gracefully as a gymnast. Fast and manoeuvrable, he has little in common with his lumbering *Tekki* cousins.

"Despite the impressive settings and the intensity of the firefights, every aspect of the game is geared for laughs"



The scope shows which robots are open to possession. Stealth is key, as getting a clear shot in once you've been seen is tough

Adaptable as a Dremel, his right arm takes weapon fitments and his left bolts on auxiliary tools such as grenades or sniper scopes. Weapons are gloriously gratifying: rivet guns stud hysterical enemies with tiny explosive charges, buzz-saw blades lodge and spin with a gusto that would be gruesome in organic enemies.

This component approach allows for an inventive integration of familiar friends. The scope can be combined with any right arm weapon, allowing for precision rocketing. Conversely, the right arm slingshot can be used with any left arm projectile, lending your EMP grenades greater distance and accuracy.

It's not a system inspired by austere concepts of balance. It's one designed to cater for the whims and impulses of the player. Early on you face a powerful bot, positioned high on a bridge. Your choice. Do you blow the bridge out from under him? Use the scope to up your accuracy and shear off both his gun arms? Then again, you could always pepper him with rivet charges and see if he panics into freefall.

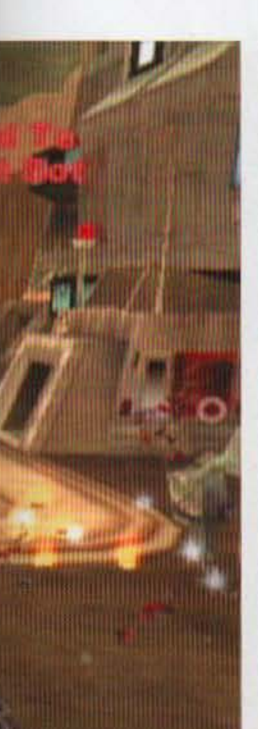
Glitch isn't just compatible with peripherals. Using an electronic tether he can assume stealthy control of any robot with an open D-port (**Edge** senses the birth of a new euphemism). Over a limited range, this allows him to stroll undetected among enemy bots, or avail himself of their higher calibre weaponry.

Glitch in the System never forgets its robot theme. On assuming tether-control of another bot, Glitch collapses into a jumble of inert parts, safe from enemy scrutiny or attack. Once the connection is relinquished, pieces float themselves back into place like magnets, and he fits his head back on with a judicious wiggle.

This integrity is maintained with gun emplacements and vehicles. If they can use them, so can you. Enemies are as vulnerable to each other's fire as to yours. When possessing another robot, its abilities and weaknesses remain as they were when it was your opponent – there are no convenient allowances made. Environments are sensible

Format: **PS2, Xbox, GC**
Publisher: **Vivendi Universal**
Developer: **Swingin' Ape Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Winter**

Previously in **E**125







rather than deformable: windows smash and walkways crumble while level structure remains intact.

Despite the impressive settings and the intensity of the firefights, every aspect of the game is geared for laughs. Not, thankfully, the self-conscious, scripted humour often found in games, hamstrung by subtitles and deflated by loading times. This is a natural comedy, born out of the distinct characters of the robots and the slapstick consequences of player actions. Bigger robots can be sliced down to a pair of renegade legs, careering uselessly into lamp posts. Commandeer a giant enforcer, and watch with guilty glee as enemy fire shorts out its powerful limbs, converting him to a limbo-dancing scarecrow.

It's a confident step. Controls, physics, combat and camera all have to be solidly in place before a game can risk sending itself up. But it's also a welcome step. If emergent gameplay is to become more than a perplexing buzzword, then its implementation needs to develop beyond randomly spawning enemies and competent squad AI. Levels that play through differently depending on how hard you're laughing present possibilities ripe for further exploitation.

Fifty missions are promised, as well as a variety of multiplayer modes. If the level pacing and puzzle designs are adaptable enough to accommodate the flexibility of the basic game mechanics, then Swingin' Ape should have all the components in place for a robotic delight.





The diversity in the animation and movement patterns of the robots isn't simply a device to add character. Weapons and tactics must be adjusted to suit as they wheel, charge and jump

Homeworld 2

Format: PC
Publisher: Sierra Entertainmen
Developer: Relic Entertainmen
Origin: US
Release: August (US), September (UK

It's space combat evolved for the successor to Relic's critically acclaimed RTS-in-space title



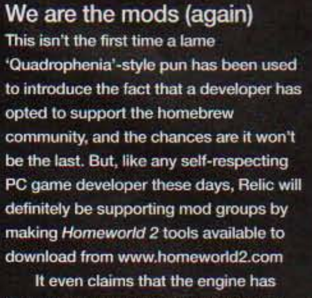
The task of updating *Homeworld* was always going to be a potentially tricky one. First there's the game's particularly fervent fanbase, for whom the highly successful formula employed in the original title is sacrosanct. And then there's the fact that no other game has really managed to implement realtime strategy space combat in three dimensions quite as successfully as *Homeworld*. Thus, developing a sequel was always going to require a delicate balancing act to maintain both this intuitive implementation of space combat while keeping the fans happy.

The most obvious feature of the sequel is, consequently, its similarity to the first instalment. Taking place after the long journey to Hiigara depicted in the original *Homeworld*, the sequel sees the Hiigarans, having rebuilt their civilisation, defending it from a new alien threat. Thus begins a game that's once again characterised by 'epic story-driven gameplay' and sterling production values. Opening cut-scenes are as atmospheric and engaging as those in *Homeworld*, and although it doesn't feature any tracks from prog-rockers Yes, the soundtrack is also involving and expressive.

Above all though, the basic formula remains unchanged; this is a highly polished RTS that makes full use of three dimensions, featuring sumptuous visuals, a well developed tech-tree progression and a gently escalating test of tactical perspicacity. Yet in spite of the fundamentally familiar game mechanics, *Homeworld 2* does manage to refine this formula – principally by offering a radically streamlined interface.

Although the original control scheme has been included to keep that fervent fanbase happy, the default system offers a more intuitive camera control, menu systems that don't obscure the action, and a number of interface refinements. As an example, in addition to grouping ships by hotkey or by type, it's also possible to organise units into Strike Groups, which increases the ease of synchronising the actions of different ship classes.

Another difference is that the various fleets in the game are more differentiated from one another than in the original *Homeworld* – to meet one criticism of the original, which was that the unit selection of each of the game's opposing forces was too similar. This time around there are three NPC races, including the Vaygr, which is playable in multiplayer modes, offering faster ships in larger fleets. The Hiigaran fleet, on the other hand, is more multi-functional, though consequently slower and fewer in number.



Homeworld 2's brightly coloured backgrounds belie the game's space setting, and combat environments are further enlivened by debris clusters that eventually prove to be of crucial significance to the development of the game's epic narrative





There hasn't been another RTS that has done justice to the grandiose sweep of space combat to quite the same extent as *Homeworld*, but the sequel manages to refine the interface of its predecessor, and offers greater tactical variation

We are the mods (again)

This isn't the first time a lame 'Quadrophenia'-style pun has been used to introduce the fact that a developer has opted to support the homebrew community, and the chances are it won't be the last. But, like any self-respecting PC game developer these days, Relic will definitely be supporting mod groups by making *Homeworld 2* tools available to download from www.homeworld2.com

It even claims that the engine has been designed with mods in mind from the outset, offering significant support and high levels of customisation.





Alter Echo

Format: **PS2, Xbox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **In-house (Outrage Entertainment)**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**125

Science fiction and videogames have always had an affinity, yet THQ's latest offering is likely to push your mumbo-jumbo tolerance threshold to its limits

Take a good look at the screenshots. Weird. They remind **Edge** of 'Fantastic Voyage' – we're talking about the terrific 1966 film rather than Quicksilva's Spectrum tribute, though that wasn't half bad either. Alas, this is not about exploring internal organs in miniaturised form – it's more outlandish than that. You might want to sit down and take a shot of whisky before reading on.

The planet Proteus is covered with a strange material called Multiplast; a substance that can be mutated into bio-machines by chaps called the Shapers. Crystal clear so far? Now enter Paavo: a Shaper with an ego too large for his bubble head. He gets ideas above his station. Then what happens? He goes and creates EchoPlast, that's what. EchoPlast becomes sentient. Paavo goes insane. The universe is about to turn in upon itself like a tortured simile.

Unless… **Edge** starts the game with little prior knowledge about *Alter Echo*. We see Nevin, the hero of the piece. He's a likeable character: innocent, caring, bemused by his surroundings. Pretty generic, then, except that his upper body belongs to 'Tron' and his feet to Shaquille O'Neal.

To the game. The sword combat is still weak, and while three main attacks can be strung together into combos, collision detection is a little off. The juggle command is lame; it sends your opponent into the air, and briefly out of sight, so timing a second hit as the foe plummets to the ground is tricky. It's just as well, then, that Nevin's echoplasticity allows him to morph into two other forms: a gun-suit and a stealth creature. In gun form Nevin is ponderous, but the extra fire-power can take down tough enemies and smash through doorways. While in stealth mode, Nevin can jump over chasms using node points, climb certain bits of scenery and turn invisible for brief periods.

Experienced gamers will already know how this plays out. Each room provides a particular challenge – take out the enemies, destroy the blocked passage, jump over the chasm, climb to the switch on the roof, whatever. From the early levels **Edge** has played it's all a little obvious, though there's still hope that more complexity can be built in.

THQ thinks that this is a hugely ambitious project, but these are old ideas repackaged in, admittedly, new and surreal clothes. At least there's no danger that Nevin will ever get too big for his boots.





Nodes can be destroyed to open the way ahead or trigger special events. Once Nevin fully upgrades his PolySuit he can transform into sword form, gun form or stealth form – each drains energy, however

It's hard to fathom who this will appeal to. Its current gameplay mechanics are too bland for hardcore gamers while the visual style is too outlandish for a massmarket fed mostly on quasi-photorealism



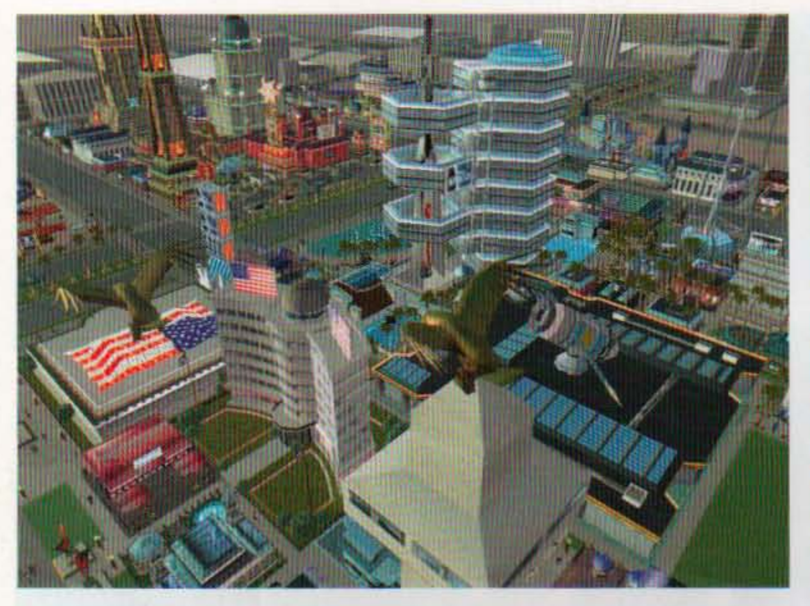
A trip through time

One after-effect of EchoPlast's formation is that it grants Shapers the power to distort time. Pressing R3 triggers a clever minigame in which the player must move his counter from the centre of a grid to reach his symbolic enemies. However, each movement must be timed, rhythm action-style, increasing the difficulty and the fun. Perform well and your foes will be struck down before they know what's going through their tiny little minds.

Vega$: Make it Big

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Empire Interactive**
Developer: **Deep Red Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **September 19**

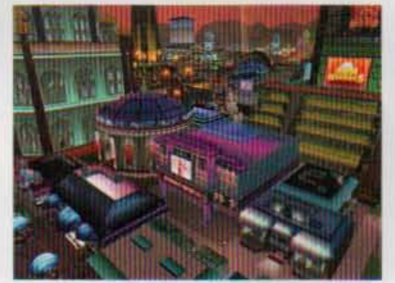
Creating gaudy hotels, promoting cheesy magicians and overseeing two-bit strip joints – it's all in a day's work for a casino empire builder



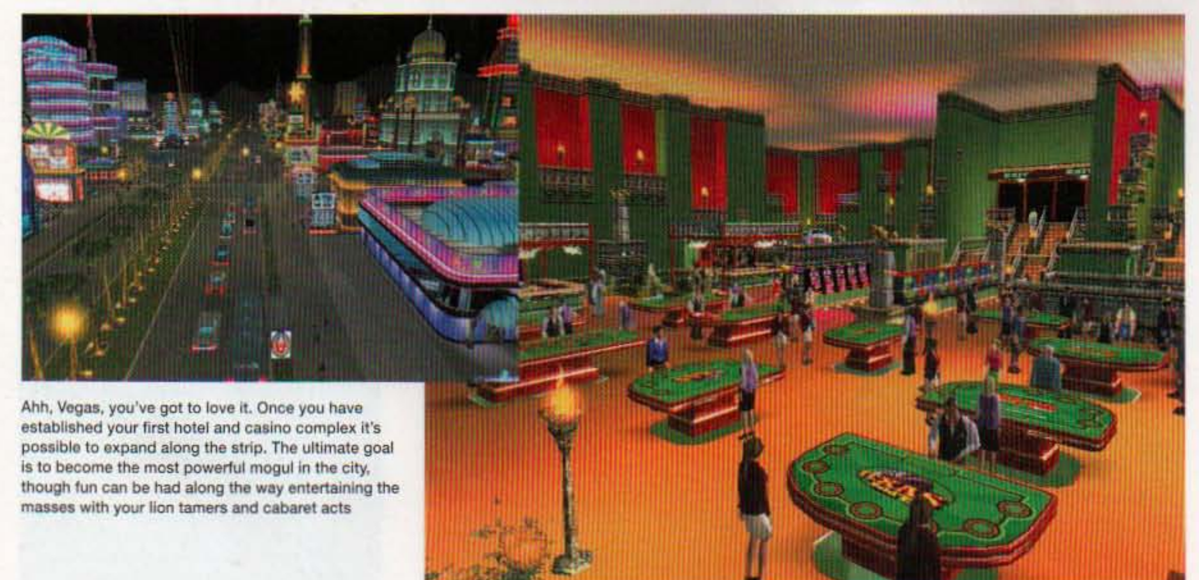












Ahh, Vegas, you've got to love it. Once you have established your first hotel and casino complex it's possible to expand along the strip. The ultimate goal is to become the most powerful mogul in the city, though fun can be had along the way entertaining the masses with your lion tamers and cabaret acts

If you want to run a crooked table just adjust the 'takes' in the house's favour. This will increase profits, but over time may cause punters to go elsewhere. Employing security guards should prevent any nasty scams

Not that **Edge** is into gambling or anything, but the prospect of a tycoon title based around the heady world of Las Vegas gaming was too mouth-watering to ignore. Unsurprisingly this is a rags-to-riches tale: you must develop a small lot on the Vegas strip and eventually build a multi-million dollar gambling empire.

There are ten themed building styles already in the game (think Mayan temples and futuristic space stations) though a flexible editing suite allows creative users to replicate the real-life monstrosities currently populating the Las Vegas strip. Indeed, part of the appeal in *Vega$* lays in generating the gaudiest set of themed buildings possible. Consistency of construction, it would seem, goes down well with the punters.

You start out with a limited budget so early management decisions revolve around pulling in the crowds with simple hotels and modest facilities. Cleverly each of the individuals cruising the strip has different needs and wants. High rollers are looking for big money games, while families prefer restaurants and joy rides. Focusing on the kind of punter you want to entice into your lot is important; it's not a good idea to put a nipple parlour next to an Elvis-themed chapel, for instance. Even in Las Vegas, that would be tasteless.

The camera is incredibly flexible and dynamic – zooming around your playworld is effortless. Penetrate inside buildings and a new world of micro-management possibilities open up. Although prefabricated casino floors can be selected, much of the challenge comes from designing layouts to maximise profits. Along with changing the 'takes' on the tables it's important to make sure the smells coming from lavatories and food areas do not put off potential gamblers. Furthermore, high rollers tend to prefer sheltered areas away from the hustle and bustle.

Variety is also crucial and the ratio between roulette, craps, blackjack and slot machines must be finely balanced. Detail even extends to changing the kind of car you have in the lobby as the casino's grand prize. As a casino mogul it's also your duty to employ and pay staff. These range from cocktail waitresses to security guards and each have varied personal ratings and pay expectations.

With subgoals that include staging your own high-profile boxing match, *Vega$: Make it Big* is looking like a very accomplished tycoon title. Whether the market can take any more of these management games is entirely another matter.

Samurai 2

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Spike
Developer: Acquire
Origin: Japan
Release: TBC

After production of the third Tenchu title went to K2, Acquire has focused all its efforts on this follow-up to Way of the Samurai





Dejima is home to some calculatingly cute children in need. Helping them may earn you cash, but risks the attentions of the local Yakuza

Conceived as an action-oriented foil to *Tenchu*'s surveillance and stealth, *Samurai 2* sets out to strengthen the reputation of the *Way of the Samurai* series.

The open nature of the first game's narrative is expanded by the initial choice between three characters. You wander the streets of Dejima, an artificial island built by xenophobic Edo shoguns to house foreigners and prevent the spread of their cultures and religion. It's a setting which allows the inclusion of some of the more incongruous characters familiar from the original. The people you meet and events you witness influence the path you take through the game, and repeated play-throughs unveil more of the story.

However, being as your character is a swordsman, many of the events you trigger will be violent. The combat system has been embellished, with more emphasis on blocks, sidesteps and counters. Swordsmiths offer the possibility of improving or replacing your weapon, and it's likely the complex system of balanced upgrades will be retained.

The first game's mix of action, authenticity and narrative proved enormously successful in Japan, where it sold 250,000 copies at launch. *Samurai 2* has every chance of eclipsing this success.



There are three distinct characters available: the young samurai cuts a lonely figure, the aggressive fighter is armed with twin katanas, and the veteran is a skilled swordmaster

Magatama

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft Game Studios
Developer: In-house (Tokyo)
Origin: Japan
Release: Q4 (Japan), TBC (UK)

Previously in E126

Announced at the Japanese Xbox conference, Magatama shows that Microsoft isn't quite pinning all its hopes for the region on True Fantasy Live Online

It has taken Microsoft some time to find titles which appeal to the particular tastes of the Japanese market. A lack of local development support has made its job harder, but recent announcements suggest a corner has been turned.

Magatama's story is inspired by both Japanese history and folklore. Playing the part of a katana-wielding samurai you are charged with defeating enemies who pose a threat to the stability of the feudal state. These enemies consist of both renegade samurai and mythical beasts, most of whom seem to be of a scaly persuasion.

The emphasis is very much on rapid action. Combat is controlled by a single button, repeated tapping of which triggers combos. It's a system which could run the risk of monotony, but rather forms the basis for an intriguing team-up. Details are sketchy, but the central character's abilities seem to be linked to his dragon sidekick, who battles with him, and who he may be able to ride.

The game's designers include Hiroshi Kawai, who worked on *Final Fantasy VII* and *IX*, and although the setting is Japanese, the game's creator is said to be aiming for a 'pan-Asian' tone, which it hopes will make the game as palatable to the west as Square's best-selling RPG has proved.



Magatama are curved stones or jewels sacred to Shinto. Although it is not clear if this is what inspired the game's name, it seems likely in the context of the story's inspirations





Sumptuous environments are reminiscent of *Onimusha 2*'s prerendered backdrops, but *Magatama* will be fully three-dimensional

Dinosaur Hunting

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
Developer: **SCARAB**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **September 18 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Despite sticking firm to a September release date, information is proving very scarce on this new dinosaur hunting game, Dinosaur Hunting. Clue's in the name, you see

The scale of the saurians is certainly impressive, but is likely to present control and combat difficulties. These will have to be met with speed and flexibility if the game is to avoid becoming reduced to just a series of boss encounters

Were **Edge** forced to take a guess, it would hazard that the name of the main character in this period shooter is almost certainly Dinosaur Hunter. Set in Guiana in 1910, which must be a first for videogames, the story opens with the miraculous discovery that dinosaurs have survived for millions of years in the depths of the Amazonian jungle.

Courtesy of a suitably shady multinational named Ark, the world's best hunters, of whom your character is one, are gathered to hunt and trap the animals. Armed with a rifle – no doubt called a Dinosaur Rifle – your job is to stalk the dinosaurs by following their footprints, calls and droppings. Once in your sights, you must carefully estimate the amount of tranquiliser needed to sedate them. Overdo it, and your score is heavily penalised.

A number of features make *Dinosaur Hunting* an appealing prospect. The delicate nature of the drug capture suggests a *Pokémon*-style juggle of judgement, and the mysterious nature of Ark opens up the possibility of getting hold of futuristic weaponry. Although, whether that's futuristic from the perspective of 1910, or from a contemporary point of view is still anyone's guess – for another couple of months till it's released, anyway.





Dinosaur hunters seem vulnerable to a laudable range of occupational hazards: kickings, stranglings, stampings, bitings and tossings

Dragon Drive: D-Masters Shot

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Bandai**
Developer: **Treasure**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **August 8 (Japan), TBC (UK)**

Bandai sets out to cover all its bases with a dragon riding, card battling, link-up compatible, evolution based shooter inspired by the hit anime series

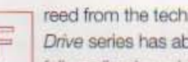




The urban environments are appealing, both for their exploratory potential in free roaming mode and for their tactical possibilities in battle



The lock-on targeting system and on-rails play indicates that any resemblance to *Panzer Dragoon Orta* is perhaps not purely cosmetic



Freed from the technical limitations of the PSone, the *Dragon Drive* series has abandoned an RPG approach in favour of fully realised combat.

Only a minority of the stages require the kind of *Star Fox*-style on-rails shooting suggested by these screen shots. Others offer the chance to roam freely, discovering items and triggering battles and events. The boss mode would sound a tedious inevitability in the hands of anyone but Treasure; **Edge** hopes the developer's usual crazed exuberance isn't stifled by licence limitations.

Dragon design is lavish and imaginative, with each creature able to evolve into three new states. Special attacks are replenished by the Synchro Balls collected after each victory, and tactical variety is offered by the shield system, which uses up this special attack power at a much slower rate.

The game has clearly been conceived to take full advantage of its cross-media heritage. Booster cards can be unlocked with codes from the forthcoming Game Boy Advance title (a card-battle RPG) or from the Website and magazines associated with the card game and 30 minutes of animated footage is also included.

A twoplayer battle mode simply completes an already promising picture. 

Hardware Online Arena

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **September**

Previously in **E**112

Sony is still not shouting about its online strategy, but Hardware looks like it could shake gamers out of their apathy, at least in Europe





The levels provide generous numbers of pick-ups including rockets, energy beams and health. Raining down destruction from above is great fun

To kids the idea of taking charge of a tank and blowing away an assortment of enemy armoured vehicles is the stuff dreams are made of. And let's face it, that kind of power is alluring no matter how old you get. It's the kind of primal desire Sony is hoping to tap into with *Hardware*.

But there's subtlety too: intimidating firepower is not the first thing you notice, it's the well-judged physics. Much more exaggerated than you'd expect (especially the jeep and buggy) the vehicles can be thrown around with joyous abandon. The environments, ranging from Inca temples to spaceship hangars at Area 51, have been designed with this in mind. With plenty of ramps, jumps and secret caverns to explore, the marriage between driving and shooting has been balanced perfectly.

Edge's experience on the beta trial has been favourable; everything works proficiently and it's clear that this has been honed for online play, rather than just existing as a lame extra. The only question mark is whether it can remain interesting over long periods of time. As with most online console games the mission design is very conservative. How many more King of the Hill, Capture the Flag and Deathmatch games can consumers take, no matter how clever the vehicle physics?



During the beta trial Edge's favourite vehicle was the buggy (left). It's the nippiest of the rides available and its weak cannon can soon be augmented with more powerful weapons

Conflict: Desert Storm II

Format: **Xbox, PS2, GC**
Publisher: **SCi**
Developer: **Pivotal Games**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q4**

Previously in **E**125

More urban environments and fewer goats, promises SCi for the sequel to one of last year's most successful games. But Edge liked the goats...

The timing of SCi's *Conflict: Desert Storm II* is hardly delicate, but then, how long must one wait before such things become palatable? Moral issues aside, **Edge** will judge the game by its gameplay merits, and by that yardstick, things are looking promising.

Those familiar with the original will remember two things: the sense of horror when an enemy armoured vehicle rumbled into sight (good) and the atrocious AI (bad). Developer Pivotal has taken on board criticisms from fans so as to significantly improve this sequel. In particular your squad can expect to encounter a greater range of enemy vehicles, including helicopter gunships, and detail extends to phosphor grenades that can set alight enemies (or even yourself, though a roll on the ground can put out the flames).

Tracer fire is now colour coded (according to war convention) which makes the tremendous fire-fights less confusing, while the enemy AI is markedly better. Significantly, it's now possible to sneak up on enemies because each operates by cones of sight and hearing. Pivotal also boast that the game is more emergent – **Edge** noted that snipers can be taken out with well placed shots, or avoided merely by throwing smoke grenades to obscure their vision. It's a significant improvement on the original, then.



Desert Storm II **employs a novel recovery system. This time you must get every member of the squad over the finish line, and to help you achieve this medipacks can resuscitate fallen colleagues. This engenders a greater sense of fraternity and deepens your strategical approach**





The Xbox (above) and GameCube versions of the game will support a fourplayer co-op mode. The PS2 version only supports a twoplayer equivalent

Pure Pinball

Format: **Xbox, PC**
Publisher: **Iridon**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Sweden**
Release: **TBC**

Previously in **E**126

Fast cars, train wrecks, bi-planes and balls of steel. Swedish developer, publisher and jack-of-all-trades Iridon demonstrates that pinball belonged on Xbox all along





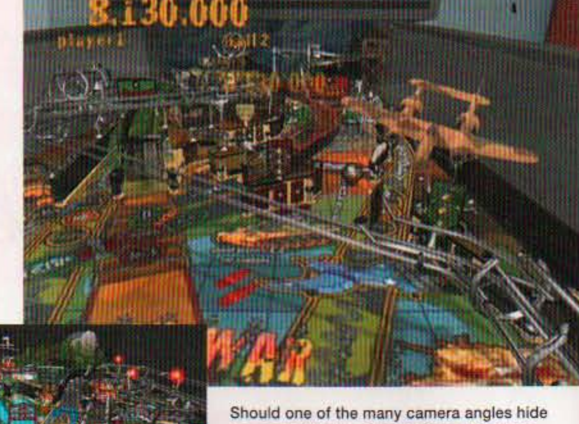
Detailed options include the removal of the table's glass overlay, or of the the rather smart but confusing reflections of the room it stands in

Faced with the technical potential of the Xbox, most developers think big rather than small. *Pure Pinball*'s simple focus could expand the stylistic range of the machine and therefore represents a welcome addition to its portfolio.

Setting the camera to follow the ball produces a swooping tour of the lavish tables. Rather than the tangle of detail apparent from the top-down view, from the ball's perspective the rails and layers tower above you, bumpers as big as football stadiums. It's a neat little Lilliputian switch that makes the tables physical and fascinating.

It would be a useful addition to allow such close-up inspection of the table before the game begins. As it stands on the preview code **Edge** has been sent, the first few rounds on each level pass as a blur, while you fiddle with camera angles and gape at the complexity. Bonuses trigger well-chosen sound effects, and a good run builds a cacophony of toots and revs and pings. Controls feel a little simplistic, however, particularly the tilt which is disappointingly mechanical and unresponsive.

A PC version of the game received a limited release earlier this year. If Iridon can launch the Xbox version at a similarly modest price, the field should be clear for *Pure Pinball*.



4.911.400
RUNAWAY TRAIN

Should one of the many camera angles hide the score display of the cabinet, the game automatically displays an info box in the corner of the screen

The Saga of Ryzom

Format: **PC**
Publisher: **Nevrax**
Developer: **Wanadoo**
Origin: **France**
Release: **Autumn**

Previously in **E**108

Can innovation find breathing space among the jostling crowd of big licensed MMRPGs? Nevrax certainly hopes so. It has an epic tale to tell

The scramble for the precious subscriber dollar is getting fierce. With the relentless march of *EverQuest* and the army of licensed MMRPG's it has inspired, it's left to the likes of *The Saga of Ryzom* to truly liberate the genre.

Possessing all the flair that befits its Paris locale, *Ryzom*'s fantasy setting builds a lush manga-inspired environment with a thriving ecosystem that interacts with the communities of the world of Atys. Players will forge their own destiny or work with guilds to further the path of their civilisation, with a mission structure that embraces the newbie whilst handing the experienced players the prospect of shaping both landscape and storyline.

A full genetic character system allows players to retire heroes and play on with their own brethren, inheriting attributes and skills of their parent. A full suite of editing tools, meanwhile, will encourage the development of guilds to construct their own 'homeworld' regions that can be incorporated as new areas in an ever-expanding world.

The sheer beauty of *Ryzom* will of course be the initial hook, and, if early expectations can be managed, the enthusiasm and vision of developers Nevrax will have the opportunity to go to work. Then the *Saga* should every chance to flourish.



Nevrax plans to support the online game with a number of ambitious complementary services including the opportunity to carry out auctions and guild voting via your mobile phone





Guilds will be able to organise themselves and pitch for 'contracts' that will see them fulfil vital roles in the development of their civilisation

Prescreen Alphas
This month's announcements and updates...

Naval Ops: Warship Gunner

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Koei
Developer: In-house





Although it's one of the great number of World War II titles in development, *Naval Ops* distinguishes itself by its marine setting and strategic scope, and it's by an expert in the field

Tony Hawk's Underground

Format: PS2, Xbox, GC
Publisher: Activision
Developer: Neversoft Entertainment





Progress from unknown local to pro-level skater; explore the nine levels on foot (or by car) for session spots; upload your face into the game; share skate parks online... It's promising stuff

Takahashi Naoko no Marathonshiyo!

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Taito
Developer: In-house





Takahashi Naoko is a famous Japanese athlete, and this game, based on her exploits, sees would-be winners training a single athlete while fighting to maintain financial solvency

Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown

Format: PC, PS2, Xbox
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Cinemaware

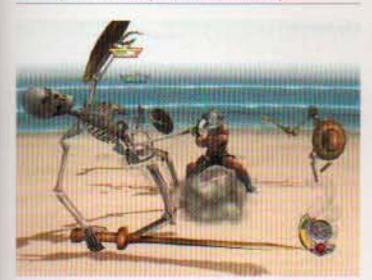




Capcom is publishing this update of the popular Cinemaware franchise, which apparently is set to offer sword fighting, archery, jousting, siege warfare and army battles. Interesting...

Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance

Format: Xbox, PS2
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: In-house (Acclaim Manchester)





Not the realistic title implied by its association with ancient history; in fact you'll be able to raise the dead and "unleash the power of the elements" in order to vanquish your opponents

Spy Fiction

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Access Games
Developer: In-house

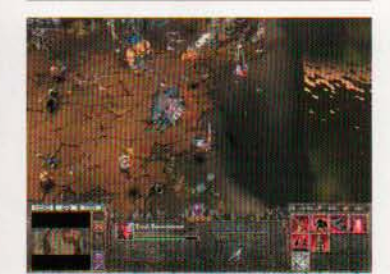




This stealth 'em up effort from newcomer Access Games seeks to blend elements from 'Mission: Impossible' and *Metal Gear Solid*, and its hero benefits from an enormous variety of gadgets

TLoTR: War of the Ring

Format: PC
Publisher: Black Label Games
Developer: Liquid Entertainment





Intriguingly, the latest title to utilise J.R.R. Tolkien's mythical universe is a realtime strategy title that offers the opportunity to play the side of the Fellowship or control the forces of darkness

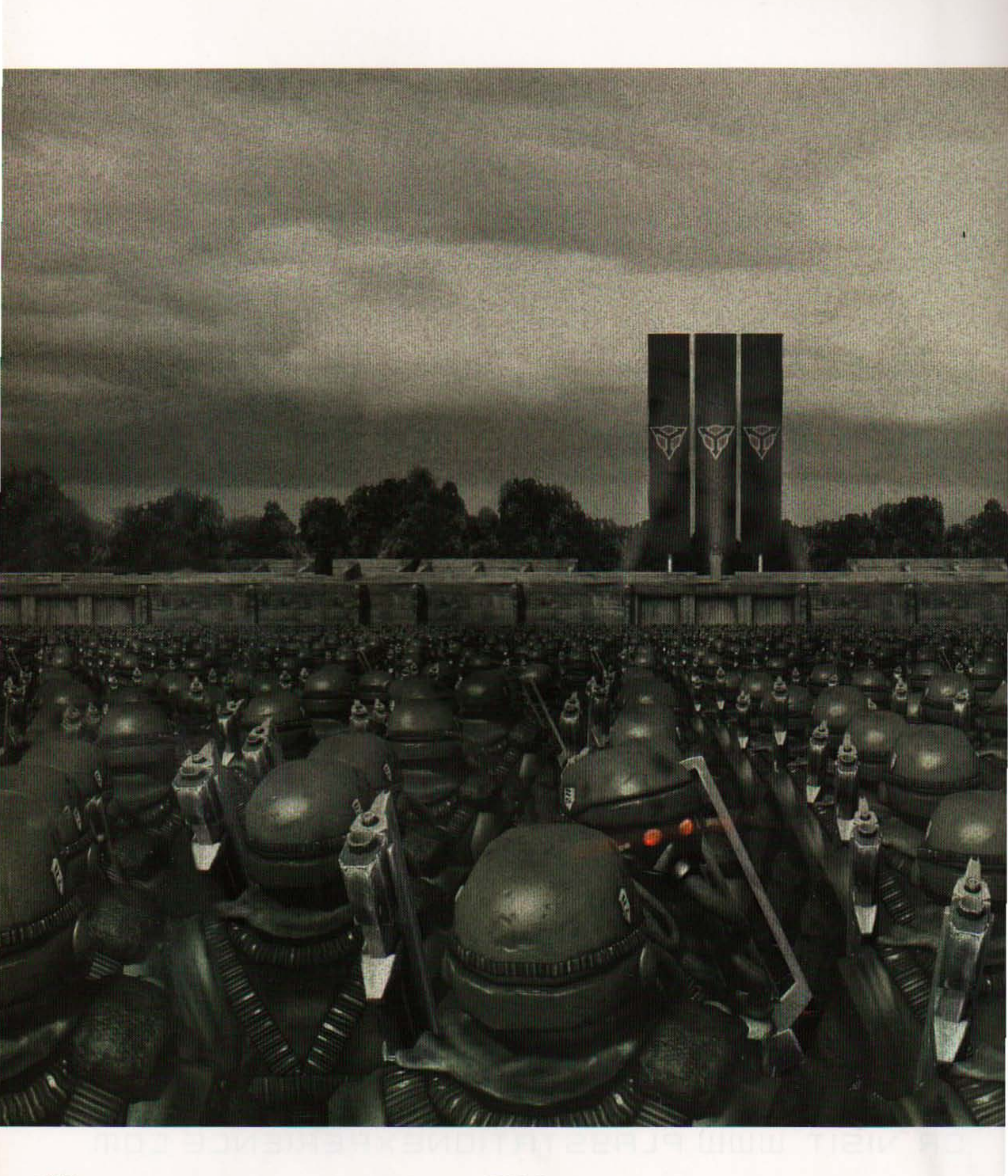
Gundam Meguriai Uchu

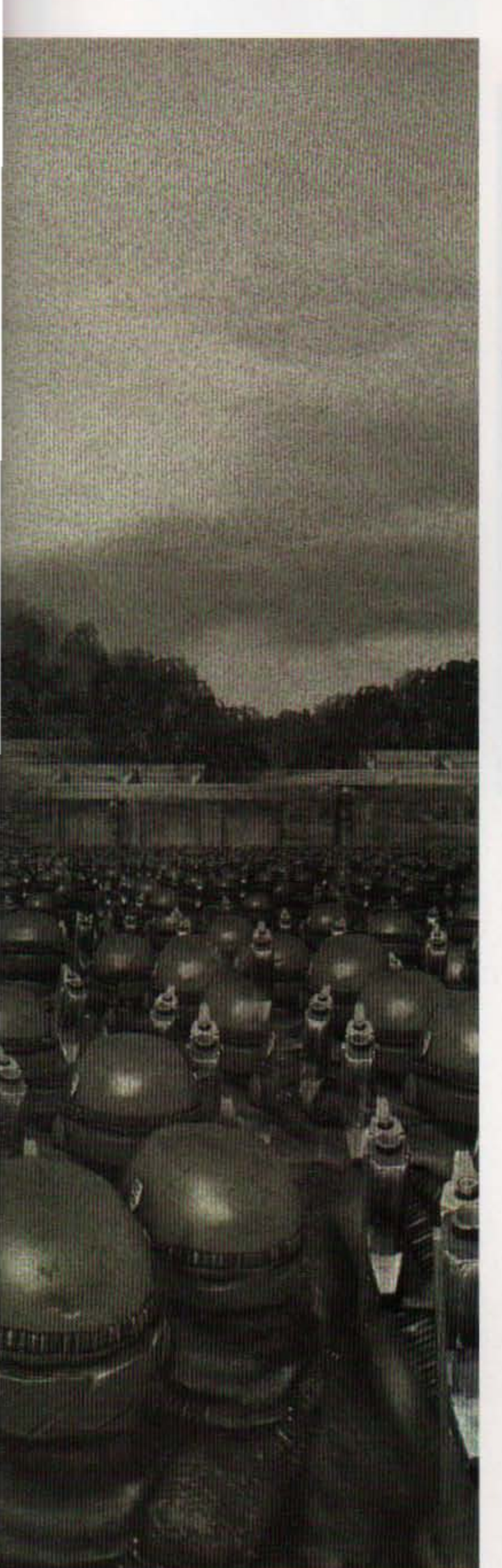
Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Bandai
Developer: In-house





In an effort to make the frenetic open combat characteristic of previous *Gundam* games more manageable, Bandai is introducing an on-rails style system, zippily called the Route Tube





Killzone

It's more than three years since its launch and PlayStation2 is still waiting for a scintillating tactical firstperson shooter. Meet the most likely candidate...

"One of the most anticipated titles ever, for any platform... and no one even knows what it is yet." Foaming praise on Internet forums, faked screenshots, the creation of Websites dedicated to disseminating the rumours. The interest in *Killzone* has caught developer Guerrilla entirely by surprise. After all, this is not a sequel to the most cherished FPS ever made, it's new IP created by a modest Dutch development team.

Formerly known as Lost Boys – you may remember it developed *Call of the Dragonfly* (see Canned Games, **E**126) until publisher apathy saw the project shelved – Guerrilla was hoping to make a big impression with *Killzone*. But this? "There are pages and pages of speculation on forums," enthuses commercial director, **Martin de Ronde**. "Our philosophy was to make an FPS that was recognisable, but had innovative twists. *Killzone* is the result of that."

After seeing substantial parts of the game, and experiencing three playable levels, **Edge** can confirm that there's a very promising game to support the rumour-mill. *Killzone* is beautifully detailed, the environments provide opportunities for warfare in both claustrophobic and open locales, the weapons are terrific, the set-pieces strong, the orchestral score lofty and powerful and the presentation and frontend up there with anything EA can produce. What are they putting in the tea over there?

After showing **Edge** the video and playable levels, de Ronde takes us on a tour around the building: animation, music, art, level design programming, AI. Accompanied by three Sony representatives, plus Guerrilla's own PR manager, it feels like a big deal. This is Sony's own *Halo*, of course, but that word is not mentioned once throughout the day. Correction: one of the programmers points out that *Killzone* has three weapon slots as opposed to *Halo*'s two. There's an uncomfortable pause. It's the kind of silence you get when someone cracks a bad joke at a funeral. It spoke volumes.

Edge's theory is that Sony is uneasy with the comparisons because *Killzone* might never be that good. While it already shows epic scope and a similar premise to Bungie's opus, *Killzone* has enough to live up to by becoming the greatest FPS title

- Format: **PlayStation2**
- Publisher: **SCEE**
- Developer: **Guerrilla**
- Origin: **Netherlands**
- Release: **Summer 2004**





The Helghast troops are menacing but they become dismayed when under intense mini-gun fire. The heavy weapons can be carried easily by the two burly members of the ISA team, but Luger struggles to walk and aim accurately with anything requiring two hands to control. The slum level (above) is remarkably polished considering the game is still a year away from its release





Get knee deep in water and your speed is compromised; carry a heavy weapon and movement is reduced to a snail's pace. Such factors should keep the player thinking and changing strategies on the fly. The kick-back from the weapons adds another layer of authenticity

on PS2. In those terms it's got a fighting chance, but Guerrilla's game also has its own peculiarities.

As the stately concept art exhibits, there's a war on. Set in a time of planetary colonisation, the status quo has been interrupted by a rapacious military faction called the Helghast. Thousands of troops ranged against a small colony – the outcome was inevitable. Videogames need heroes, and as a member of the ISA (a force loyal to Earth) you have just volunteered to undergo a suicide mission behind enemy lines. As the game takes place in the near future, you won't find any laser guns, aliens or warp holes. "We wanted to come up with our own epic war," says de Ronde. "However, we drew inspiration from many 20th-century conflicts because we wanted everything to be recognisable. To have weapons that fire green blobs may look nice as a special effect, but it takes away from the gratifying aspects of war."

"We wanted everything to be recognisable. To have weapons that fire green blobs may look nice as a special effect, but it takes away from the gratifying aspects of war"

The move away from aliens will make the game more accessible to the masses, and the decision to have four playable characters will add variety. Yes, *Killzone* is squad-based. Before that sentence strikes fear into your bones, we should point out that your team-mates are not under direct control. The idea is that you take one of the four characters through the entire game while your team-mates provide cover fire and support. To prevent frustration and tiresome restarts, colleagues that become seriously injured fall back, leaving you with the brunt of the work.

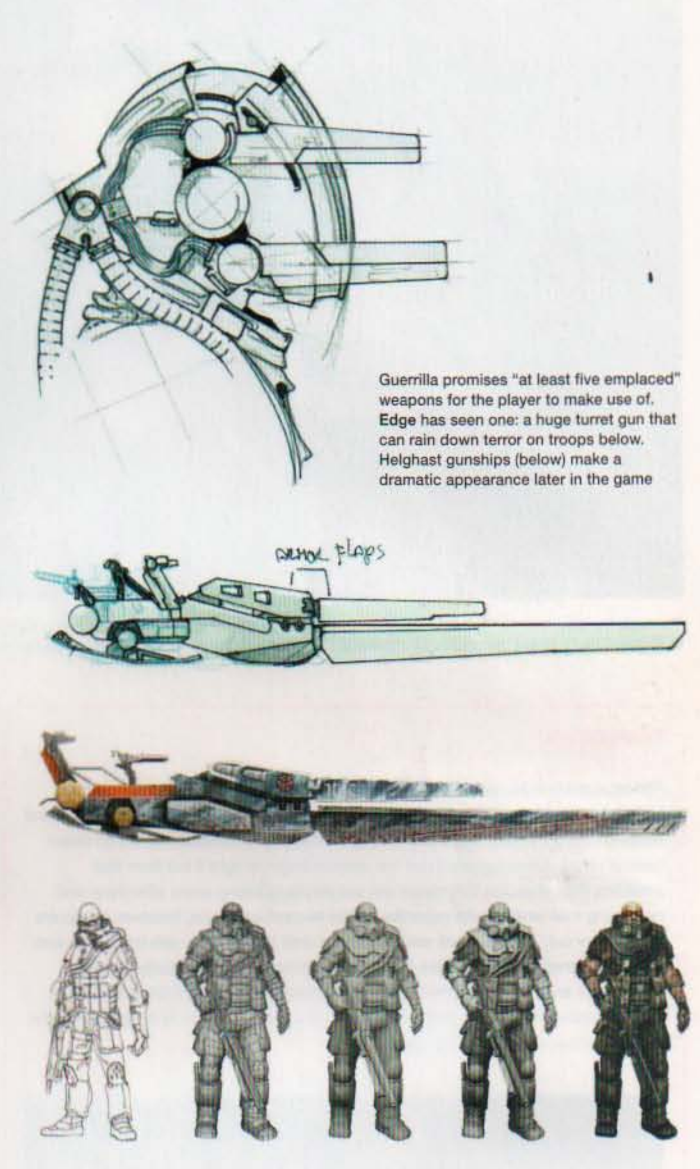
"We had three rules when we decided to have support characters," adds **Michiel van der Leeuw**, the game's lead programmer. "The first is that they will keep up and always find cover; the second, that they won't block the player's passage through the game; and the third is that they will retire back when on low health." In fact, after concern expressed by **Edge**, van der Leeuw admits that your team buddies cannot be killed by enemy fire, only weakened.

Only two characters are currently on show: Templar, a mean-looking commando (**Edge** suspects he's the all-rounder) and Luger, a female stealth character with the ability to get to places other volunteers cannot reach. You can play through the game with any character, and as videogame convention dictates, each specialises with certain weapons. Luger has a high accuracy with sniper weapons but struggles to carry and shoot the



The X button is context sensitive, delivering brutal mêlée attacks and letting you leap barriers and climb ladders





Guerrilla promises "at least five emplaced" weapons for the player to make use of. **Edge** has seen one: a huge turret gun that can rain down terror on troops below. Helghast gunships (below) make a dramatic appearance later in the game

heavy artillery. Guerrilla says that weapon choice is vital, so going through the game a second, third and fourth time with a new character forces the player to think differently about each set-piece.

Expect collapsing bridges, dropships spewing out Helghast troops, extreme firefights and APCs delivering destruction your way. As you are fighting an organised military regime the soldiers behave according to their rank. Foot-soldiers have orders issued to them by Elite officers, while Staff Commanders sit on the next rung up. Taking out the officers first can cause the grunts to panic or orchestrate their attacks less successfully. Such behaviour is currently embryonic, but the raw AI routines (see Wargames) auger well.

"The AI was working too perfectly, so we had to tweak it," admits **Arjen Beij**, *Killzone*'s AI coder. "The AI adapts to what the player is doing and there's very little scripting in the game. Each enemy conducts a tactical analysis of the terrain and has a realistic perception model. Before, they would hear or see the player too easily and they'd all run to the [player's] location. Now we've made it so the enemy is not so perceptive. It also means the player can make a noise, then move to a new location and take out the enemy when they come searching."

Over the years **Edge** has heard so many fallacious claims about AI that it's hard not to be sceptical. Yet already the game has got the simple things spot on. Throw a grenade at a group of Helghast and they flee convincingly; take out a sentry with a sniper weapon and the remaining enemies are instantly alert; try to outflank a patrol and the more vigilant troops take defensive action.

Before German Web journalists start to worry: there will be 22 weapons in the game: pistols, assault rifles, shotguns, mini-guns, rocket launchers, missile launchers, sniper weapons and hand-grenades. There's nothing outlandish about any of these weapons, but that's the point.

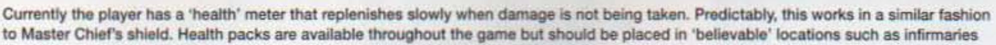


The texture quality is produced through a neat multi-layering technique. When enemies are far away layers are removed to maximise performance without impairing the visual quality









Currently the player has a 'health' meter that replenishes slowly when damage is not being taken. Predictably, this works in a similar fashion to Master Chief's shield. Health packs are available throughout the game but should be placed in 'believable' locations such as infirmaries

Wargames

Almost a game in its own right, the AI editor Guerrilla has fashioned to implement and test character behaviour is wonderful to behold. In this sequence (below) several Helghast troops defend a fortress while an ISA regiment attacks. There's no direct control – the cycle is triggered and the soldiers begin to fight it out from their positions. First time, the ISA troops win convincingly, taking cover effectively and organising their assault with expertise. In the second sequence, however, things are not so clear cut. The Helghast soldiers defend their battlements with conviction and several ISA men go down before they can reach the ladder. Eventually it's two against two and the final pitched-battle takes place on the roof of the guard tower. The ISA team wins, though only one man is left standing. If such AI is manifest in the final game then *Killzone* will be intense.





"When you hold a gun, it should feel like a gun," enthuses the game's producer, **Alastair Burns**. "Every weapon has its own personality and a secondary fire function. On top of that, your characters use each weapon more or less effectively." Recoil, spread zones and accuracy alter according to which character is carrying which gun.

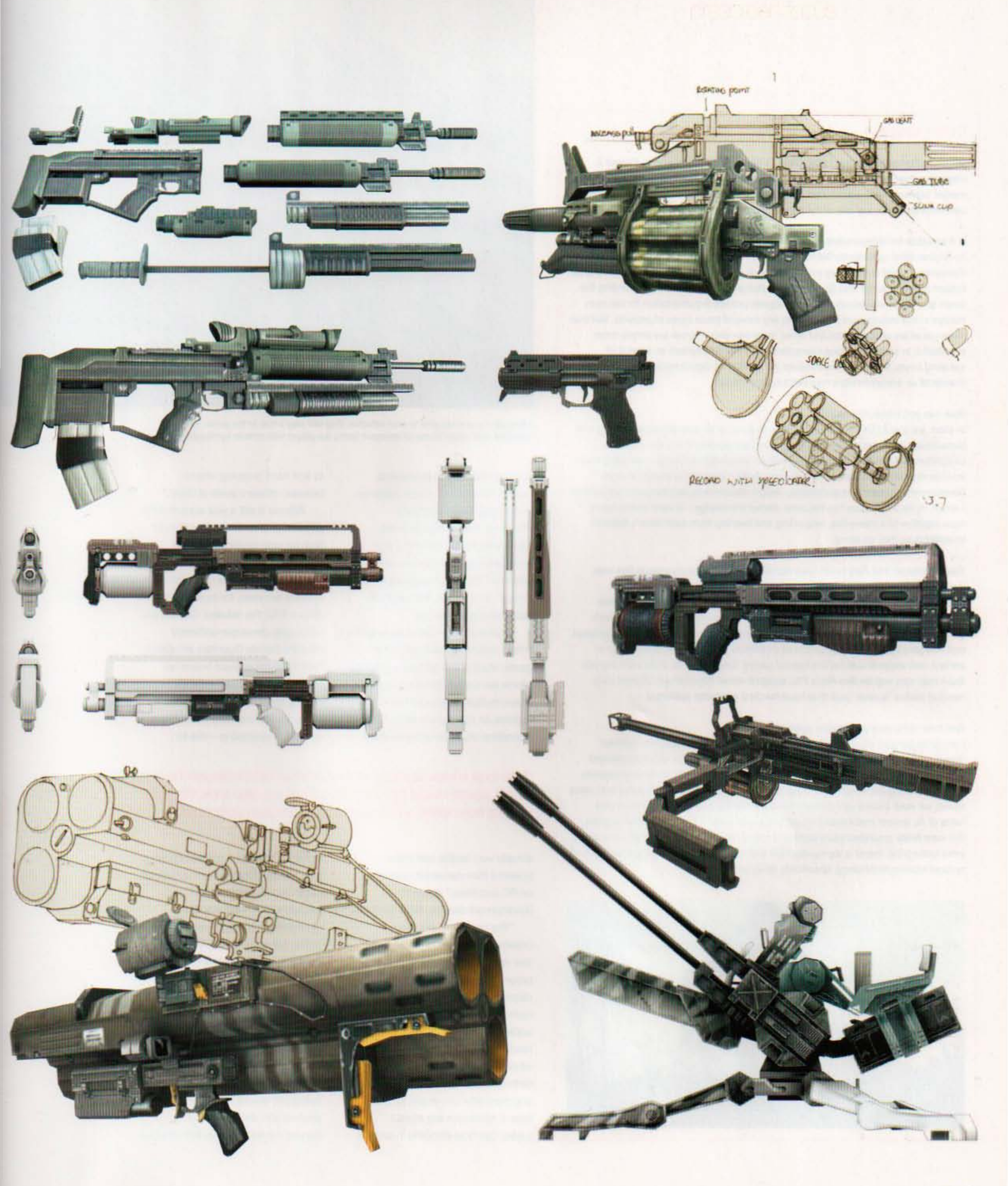
Guerrilla then demonstrates to **Edge** each weapon, specially laid out in a shooting gallery editor. A forlorn enemy ducks and weaves behind chalk target slabs. He explodes when a laser-guided missile connects with his head. A fusion of superb sound effects and impressive physics give each weapon weight and character. Both Helghast and ISA weapons can be picked up on the battlefield and it's testament to the level of detail in the game that the equipment used by each faction is noticeably different.

And what about the controls? The PS2 analogue sticks are not noted for their accuracy and sensitivity, especially for firstperson shooters. It is something Guerrilla is keen to put right. "We've done a couple of things," explains van der Leeuw. "First of all, the vertical sensitivity is more precise because players generally shoot at the same level and they don't need to make big adjustments. Secondly, the horizontal turn is very accurate at close range but the turn rate increases past 90 degrees." As you'd expect, there's a slight auto aim and the controls feel robust enough for a PlayStation2 title.

What strikes **Edge** from the start is the aesthetic tone and detail of the game. It's as stylised as *Metal Gear Solid 2*, but richer in terms of textural detail. 'Impressive' would be an understatement. Adorning the walls of the art department are countless photographs. Montages of wood grain, metal drums, abandoned aeroplanes, escalators, industrial diggers. Each level is inspired by the detail and texture contained in groups of these images.

"It's realism with a twist," summarises **Roy Postma**, the lead concept artist. "The game gets its personality at this stage, from the weapons through to the Helghast." The influences are clear to see, long trench coats, military insignia and stern uniforms. "We took a look

"When you hold a gun, it should feel like a gun. Every weapon has its own personality and a secondary fire function. On top of that, your characters use each weapon more or less effectively"


GAS TUBE
RELOAD WITH SPEEDLOADER.

Dutch courage

Martin de Ronde began his coding life at Bullfrog before moving on to Project 2 Interactive then Lost Boys. As one of the founding members of Guerrilla (a result of a merger between three established Dutch developers) he has a clear vision of how he can make the company one of the top ten independent developers in Europe.

Is it possible for independent developers to make innovative games any more?
As original titles consistently fail to 'perform at retail', it becomes evident that innovation in itself is no longer a strong enough commercial proposition. Even worse, brilliant games like *Rez* and *Super Monkey Ball* are to a certain extent sounding the death knell for innovation as their sales figures provide argumentation for decision makers in this industry not to greenlight any more of these types of projects. Not that these game are unsuccessful, but other, more mundane games are simply more successful. In an industry long characterised by risk averseness as a result of spiralling costs, this further minimalises the number of experiments and lowers the chance of us encountering a new *Tetris* or *Lemmings*.

How can you break this cycle?
In short, we should try to be commercially as creative as possible when dealing with game design innovations and even attempt to temporarily hide them inside a straightforward looking massmarket game or underneath a licence – revealing their true identity only once the massmarket penetration potential is already in sight. Developers' commercial departments, design departments and the game's publisher – which by its very nature has the most market knowledge – should continuously work together to achieve this, respecting and learning from each other's fields of knowledge as they go along.

You mentioned that *Rez* could have appealed more to the masses in this way. How so?
Yes, creatives behind the innovation should suppress fears that this will involve compromises that will affect the game experience. One could ask whether *Rez*'s game experience would have been diluted by the inclusion of songs from or product endorsement by DJ superstars such as Oakenfold and Tiesto (who seem like a perfect, non-expensive fit for this type of game). The answer is: quite probably not. But it may very well be that *Rez*'s P&L account would have looked different as a result of such a 'licence' as it may have reached a broader audience.

And how does your philosophy apply to *Killzone*?
I would be lying if I would say that we've carefully taken the approach outlined above, when we were designing this project. Our collaboration with Sony started with a technology demo. However, once work on the game got underway properly, we did look long and hard at the ways we could innovate in the FPS genre and, once found, we were indeed very careful to ensure that the game's innovations in the fields of AI, control method and squad behaviour weren't lost in a mediocre game, but were firmly grounded into a solid and sound market proposition that consumers were looking for; that of a top-quality FPS with a unique style, stunning graphics and groundbreaking technology, specifically designed for PS2.



Photography: Martin Thompson



Although you are not able to man vehicles, they still play a role in the game. APCs, gunships and 'other' forms of transport terrify the player with missile bombardments

at many of the German uniforms used in World War II, some made by Hugo Boss. There are those influences, but we also took the gas masks from World War I and some aspects from more modern uniforms." Glowing orange eyes through dark masks, the Helghast look stunningly villainous.

More impressive still is the way this artistic vision is transferred to the game. Many of the gorgeous graphical effects are created because Guerrilla draws multiple layers of smaller textures on top of each other. "The operations on a per-vertex level are actually very flexible and more powerful than per-vertex operations on PC and Xbox," explains development director, **Arjan Brussee**.

"The performance impact of drawing these extra layers is quite low, since the hard part of PS2 GS programming is already done, like clipping and transformation. As optimisations for the game we have added LOD in many stages of our rendering (and gamecode) pipeline, where for instance a highly repeating cloth structure texture is not visible any more after one meter, so this layer is not drawn any more. Layers can fade smoothly in and out to limit hard 'popping' effects between different levels of detail."

Killzone is still a year away from its official deadline, so there's plenty of time for optimisation. Yet **Edge** remains concerned by the choppy framerate. It's not that this team can't perform wonders, it's more that there's little on PS2 this detailed. Can Sony's infamously developer-unfriendly machine handle Guerrilla's ambition? "We did a risk analysis before we started in case of performance issues," says van der Leeuw. "As it turns out, the unsteady framerate is caused by raycasting – due to movement and AI – and not so much by graphical detail. We are constantly measuring the performance and estimating our headroom for optimisations and applying the most critical points of slowdown. We'll hit a constant, high framerate in the end. Some minor tweaks to content and encounters may be necessary in certain cases, but nothing that will drastically change the look or feel of the game."

"We took a look at many of the German uniforms used in WWII, some made by Hugo Boss, but we also took the gas masks from WWI and aspects from modern uniforms"

The only set-piece **Edge** witnesses is in the 'slums' level. After taking out several Helghast foot-soldiers with shotgun blasts, a gunship hones into view then deploys

abseiling troops. The orchestral score gains momentum complementing the action. **Edge** wades in, taking down as many Helghast as possible before they get their bearings. Sure, it mimics that classic scene in *Half-Life*, but the weapons feel so potent that it's a pleasure to participate.

"We call them memorable moments," smiles Burns. "There will be two like this in each section, with 26 playable levels in all. Alongside this there will be unique elements in rooms and the fact you can play through the game several times, using different strategies with different characters will give the game great variety."

Burns also reveals that *Killzone* will support online multiplayer gaming, but there is no evidence of this. Such news is exciting, and no doubt will be a boost to Sony's online ambitions, but **Edge** can't help but remain sceptical. If the game goes on sale next summer with significant online features, then it really will be magical.

Although vehicles cannot be commandeered there are moments when your gang of four is deployed by boats or APCs. Additionally, certain fixed weapons, such as turret guns, are available to use. A colony slum, a deserted shopping precinct and a river bed, these are the three levels **Edge** has witnessed. As the player goes further through the game they can expect the environments, vehicles and enemies to become more sophisticated. If Guerrilla can introduce original set-pieces along the way then it will be captivating.

Edge has many abiding memories of *Killzone*: the satisfying clunk of a mêlée attack, the grandiose orchestral score, the chunky feel and convincing sound effects of the weapons, the way an enemy disappears in a swathe of crimson under direct fire. At this stage it feels good. It's not *Halo*, so don't believe the forum hype. This is different. And, crucially, it's likely to be special in its own right.





In most scenarios the other three members of your team provide covering fire and move to the rear when injured; they cannot be killed outright. However, there is the occasional protect-and-escort mission where they become vulnerable to enemy fire

Audience with

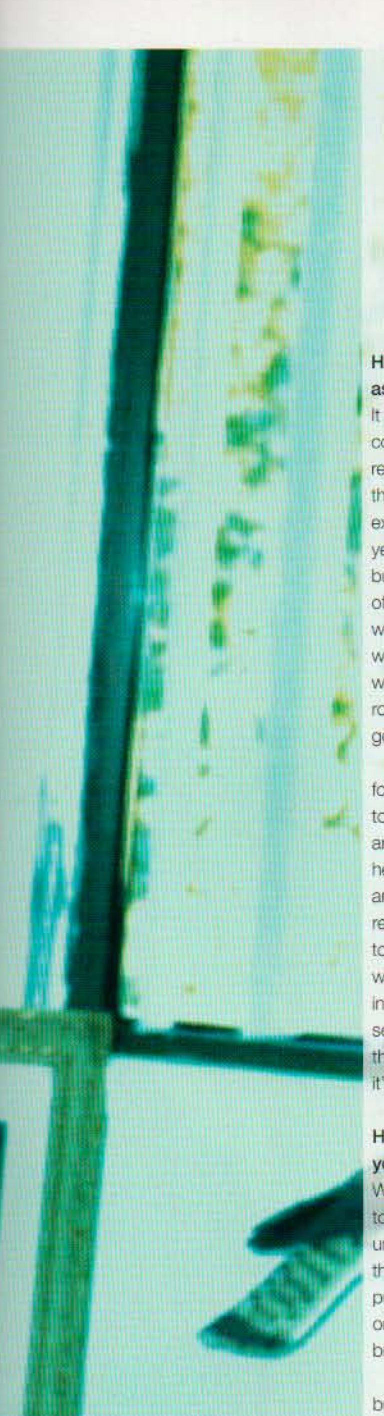
Larry Holland

founder, creative director and CEO, Totally Games



Mr Holland's opus

Having studied anthropology and prehistoric archaeology at Cornell University, **Larry Holland** entered the videogame industry in the early-'80s. His first job in the industry was at Human Engineered Software converting arcade games such as *Super Zaxxon* for home computers. He went on to work on titles such as *PHM Pegasus* and *Strike Fleet*, both published by Electronic Arts in the mid-'80s. He is perhaps most famous though, for the creation of the *X-Wing/TIE Fighter* series of space flight sims for LucasArts: *Star Wars: X-Wing Alliance* (1999), *X-Wing Collectors Series* (1998), *X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter* (1997), *TIE Fighter* (1994) and *X-Wing* (1993). His current project, *Secret Weapons over Normandy*, is the spiritual successor to a trilogy of WWII air combat games that were published by LucasArts (then Lucasfilm Games) before the *X-Wing* series: *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* (1991), *Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain* (1989) and *Battlehawks 1942* (1988).



How has studying archaeology helped you as a developer?

It didn't help with any direct material or content, but it gave me the skills to do research, and to enjoy piecing together things and discovering and trying to extrapolate. It actually took me many, many years to figure out why I was drawn to building computer games after having a love of archaeology. From when I was a little kid I wanted to be an archaeologist. I had decided when I was in the fourth or fifth grade that I wanted to be Indiana Jones – maybe not robbing idols from inside the Pyramids, but going on some adventures.

So I followed this trajectory through my life for about 20 years. But the connection was, to make a long story short, that what an archaeologist does is to take the pieces that he finds and he tries to construct in his mind and on paper a living, breathing world. And really what I find enjoyable and has drawn me to working in the videogame field, is that what we do is to build worlds which you can enter into and believe are alive, and which make sense and work. I didn't consciously make that connection till about five years ago, but it's the idea of recreating a world.

How has the industry changed since you've joined it?

Well let's see, I joined this industry in 1983, so to say it's changed would be an incredible understatement. I think the best way to typify the change is that back then if we were in the public's eye at all, if we showed up on a blip on the radar it would be in a tiny corner of the business pages – if we got mentioned at all.

Obviously today we're no longer in the business section; we're in the culture and entertainment section with television and movies and everyone else. So in the two decades that I've been in the industry we've come from being a nobody to sitting at the same table as all the other entertainment industries.

Do you think that's a good thing?

I think it's a good thing and a bad thing. It's a mixed bag. Obviously technology has changed, and the licences and sequels, and the size of teams and the pressure for delivery, aren't entirely desirable. When I started we would work on three-month games – games would be over and done with in three months. Then they crept up to six months and those were one or two people working by themselves – a jack (or jackass) of all trades who did what he could on art and sound, etc.

There was a lot of innovation and experimentation as we were all trying to figure out what this new medium was and what it could be. It's often stated, but it's not untrue, that the level of experimentation these days is lowered – and here's another example, from a crass business point of view. The budget for *Battlehawks 1942* which I did in the late-'80s was $60,000 (£38,000). That's for everything.

> "The budget for Battlehawks 1942 in the '80s was $60,000. That's for everything. Now $60,000 doesn't cover the test budget. It would cover a tiny part of the test budget"

Now $60,000 doesn't cover the test budget. It would cover a tiny part of the test budget.

So the economics have changed such that the pressures are greater. I think there are spectacular winners and a lot of losers now, that's what our industry is like today. I've heard it said that five per cent of games break even and a smaller percentage do well, and then there's the *Grand Theft Auto*s that garner hundreds of millions of dollars, and then you've got most other games. So that changes the mentality of the kinds of games that we make.

But certainly what has changed for the better is that more people can make this a wonderful career; there's far more talented people in this industry than there ever has been. You no longer have to be a jackass of all trades, you can rely on extremely talented people, which takes some of the burden off of building a product. I could talk for hours about all the changes and differences, but I'm certainly happy to be working in the industry now.

What are the biggest challenges for an independent developer such as Totally Games?

Well it's definitely economically challenging. I think the volatility of our industry has been a constant, and with that volatility there are challenges in creating a franchise or property that can sustain you. I think the key is a trusting relationship with a publisher, and that's probably the biggest challenge in the industry. It has always been my desire to find quality publishers and work with them on multiple projects over a long period of time and that's what a developer needs to have, to have some stability in their business and creative opportunities. And there really aren't that many publishers in our industry, and several of them are in states of flux, like Vivendi Universal, where there's been recent news about the founders or some of the *Diablo* guys leaving.

That's an interesting point; this issue of Edge also features a news story considering the consequences for developers of publishers taking projects in-house (see p6). Do you think that's a general trend?

It's a very common cycle that happens, and although all the different publishers won't always be in sync, publishers will often go through phases of bringing a lot of work in-house, where they will build teams in-house and at certain periods of time they'll grow to a certain complexity and therefore have inefficiency and they'll shed all of those developers, and then you'll have all sorts of new developers springing up.

This is a fairly common cycle that I've seen with many publishers in our industry. I can't say whether it's on the influx or the outflux in the US at the moment, but I think some of them are on the influx and some of them are on the outflux.

On your Website you describe your aspiration as to develop "totally involving games." How would you define a 'totally involving game'?

Here's a good parallel; if you've ever read a book that you can't put down, that you read for too many hours and it takes over your life.

"I look at people playing my games and they're bobbing and ducking their heads. That's total involvement, and it is the highest goal for an entertainment product"

We also recently ran a feature about canned games; do you have any major cancellations in your career?

I've had some cancellations where I have definitely regretted that the original creative idea did not get completed for whatever reason. For example, I was working on an Xbox title that I thought had great potential but we worked on it and worked with Microsoft on it and it was just something that didn't come together to everyone's satisfaction; it was definitely the right decision to put it aside and start something else.

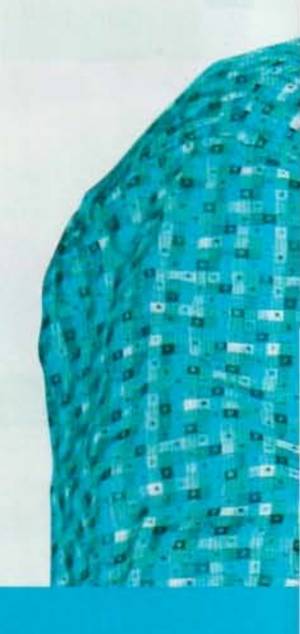
Canned games are definitely a mixed bag of agonising frustration combined with simplifying your life; I've never had a game cancelled that came as a surprise. I've never had the rug pulled out from under me, which I know has happened to many projects with many developers, and I'm sure has left them quite bewildered by the reasons or politics behind it all. I've worked on games that just haven't creatively come together and it's probably best to put those aside.

That to me is total involvement; where something is so captivating that you are connected to it on many different levels – emotionally, psychologically, physically. I've always looked at people playing my games and they're bobbing and weaving and ducking their heads, and for me that's what total involvement is, and it is definitely the highest goal for an entertainment product to reach people on those multiple levels. I think a game like *TIE Fighter* did that, and I'm hoping my current game, *Secret Weapons over Normandy* will do the same.

How easy is it to achieve that sort of multi-layered appeal?

Well I think it is hard. But I think we will achieve it since the games that I have always liked to build are ones that, at least from a controller standpoint, aren't complicated. Actually with PC games, because you have a keyboard, there's always a temptation to add new functions. Well with a console controller you're obviously limited, which forces you to hone what you think is important and what works well within the game. So I think we have a really great control scheme that has some nice features without overwhelming you.

So the controller's one part, and then obviously there's the game universe itself and what you have to do [within the game] and that's where our experience comes into play. The real way to achieve that is just to work and work and work at it. You think you've got it right and then you keep working on it.



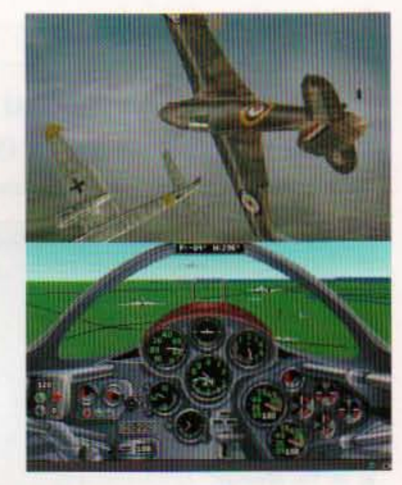
Are you worried about competition from the glut of WWII-themed games that are about to be released?
I wouldn't say there was a glut. There's a certain number of them, though not that many on consoles. There's the *Medal of Honor* series, but that's very different from our game in terms of what you're doing. I'm not too worried because I think we have a different take on it. I think the other World War II games aren't really flight games and nobody's trying to put those two together in a formula of speed and action.

What's always attracted me to the flight part of it is that I love the sensation of speed and the dog-fighting. The pure challenge of outmanoeuvring your adversary and getting on his tail and blowing him to smithereens is something that's always been compelling to me and I think that core gameplay is something we have in spades in our game. And that's quite a different fundamental mechanic from all the other games.

"The pure challenge of outmanoeuvring your adversary and getting on his tail and blowing him to smithereens is something that's always been compelling to me"

How familiar will the game be to fans of your previous *Secret Weapons* title?
Well I think those previous fans were a diverse group of people but there were definitely those who loved the action and the exotic technology, and they'll totally enjoy the game since I think it is more accessible and it has a diverse set of content. It's definitely not trying to be a flight sim, so for anyone who likes their flight sims hardcore, this game will probably be less appealing to them. With the current products, we want to bring a large scope to the mission that you're involved in, so that you feel like you're immersed in a big event.

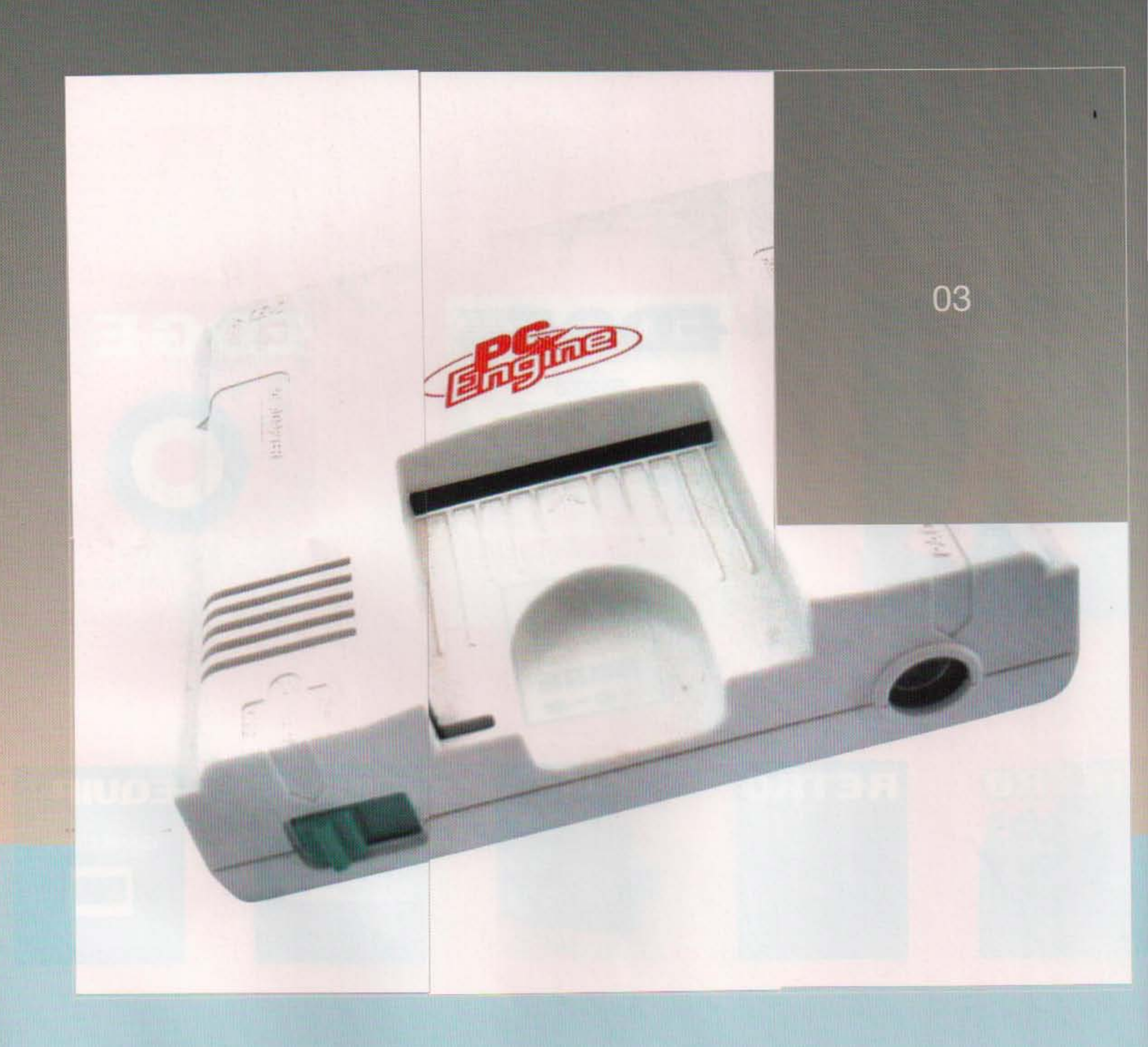
How prepared do you think you are for the next hardware transition? How are you approaching it?
Well I wouldn't say 'tentatively', but certainly 'watchfully'. We're not eager to just drop everything we're doing to jump on it. Obviously hot new technology always gets everybody excited about its potential, but I think over the last year and a half we have built up our core technology and expertise on the PS2, so we're not looking for that to go away very quickly.

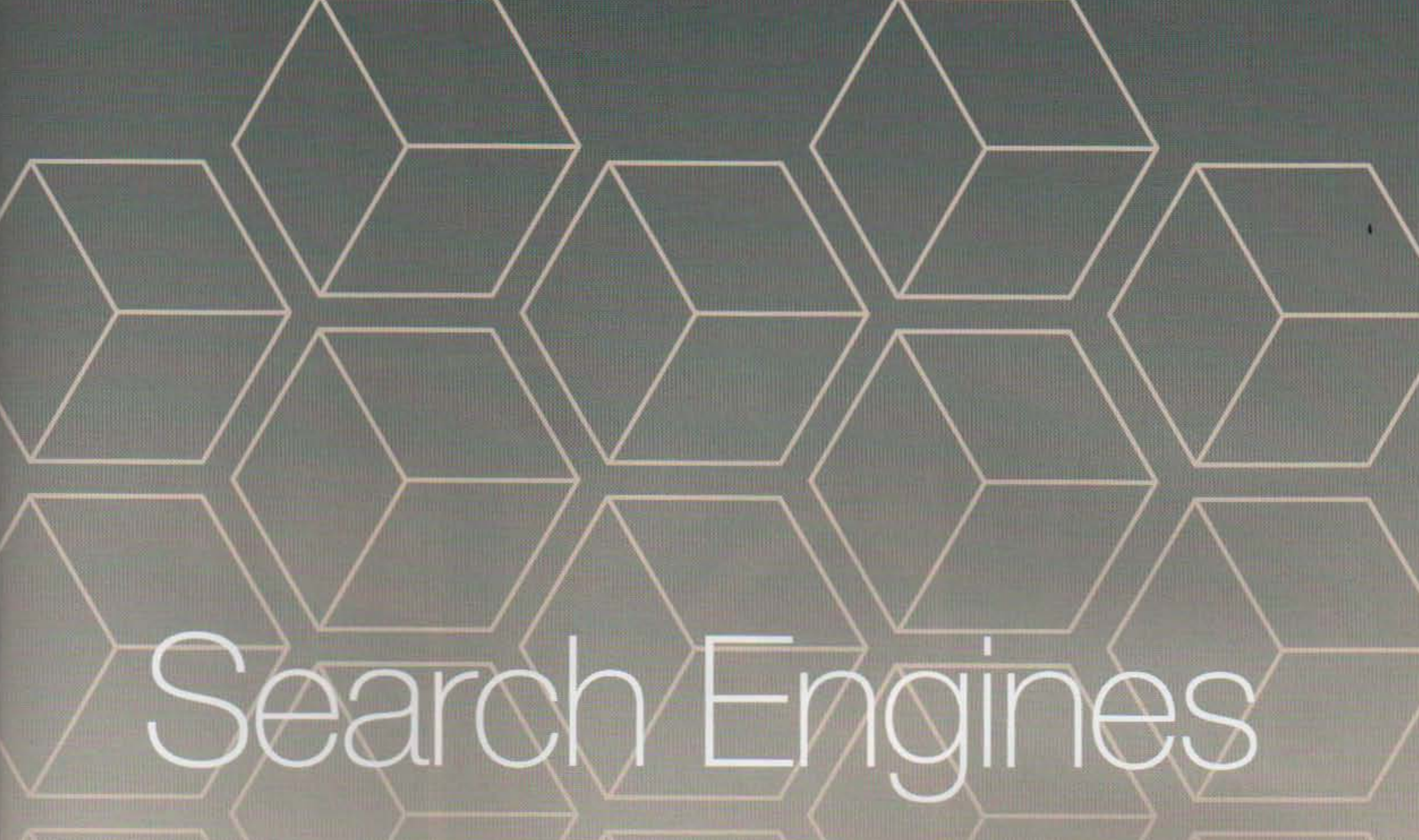


Secret Weapons over Normandy (top) is the spiritual successor to *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* (above), with which Larry Holland cemented his reputation before creating *X-Wing*

Do you think publishers will be more prepared than they were the last time around to stick with existing formats?
I think so. Especially since the leaders of the new round of platforms are likely to be Microsoft and Nintendo, and they're obviously not the market leaders. It's anybody's guess who is going to bring out the next platform, but most people believe it's not going to be Sony, since they have no reason to muddy the waters on the PlayStation platform by having people think about delaying current purchases for potential future platforms.

So I think, because the next round of hardware won't come from the market leaders, that publishers will be more attentive than they were the last time and won't abandon or shift significant resources. They'll certainly be thinking about how to support new platforms, and that will vary from publisher to publisher, but publishers like Electronic Arts won't want to give up formats that are very profitable for them. They also have a ton of expertise that they've learned in the last three to four years on these platforms, and it's actually the fourth or fifth year where a lot of that investment really begins to pay off.


03
PC Engine



Search Engines

A stunningly powerful system stocked with the finest Japan-centric programming of the late-'80s and early-'90s, the PC engine and its various incarnations nevertheless remained curios in the unwitting PAL mainstream. **Edge** charts the history of the console that almost knocked Nintendo and Sega from their lofty perches

Stop hyperventilating. **Edge** knows the complex, multi-threaded history of the PC Engine can induce fear into the heart of even the most dedicated collector. With over a dozen tweaked versions of the machine existing across the globe under a variety of names, just getting hold of the right console is a Herculean task, which is why many confident retro fetishists run back to their Famicom collections. But take a deep breath: some of the finest shooters and arcade conversions ever produced for a home system exist here and here alone, and while the machine lurks in the back of many gamers' minds as a great undiscovered continent, those who dare investigate are in for a treat.

Still, it's difficult to know where to begin and information is hard to come by. NEC was recently asked by a Japanese magazine to provide a full history of all the hardware, software and add-ons ever produced for the system. The manufacturers records, though, were as sketchy as anyone's, and it soon passed the magazine on to a collector, who provided images and information for the journalists. That goes some way to demonstrating just how poorly documented the history of the PC Engine is, something **Edge** intends to rectify here. After all, it's arguably one of the greatest systems in gaming, and yet there's barely anyone in the west who understands it at all.

Of course, 'greatest' doesn't mean 'perfect', but while the Engine has its faults, it enjoys the same kind of allure as the Japanese Saturn and Neo-Geo. At launch, in 1987, the machine had a graphical power leagues above anything seen on home systems before, and it continued to hold its own well into the next-generation wars of the early-'90s. Debate rages among those who care about these sorts of things as to whether the machine can be classed as the first true 16bit system, or whether it was just an exceptionally powerful 8bit machine, thanks to its curious internal architecture which offered a hybrid of 8bit and 16bit graphics technologies. Similarly, many argue about the PC Engine's significance within videogaming's canon; evangelists pointing out the innovation in its HuCard and CD technologies, sceptics citing the machine's appalling failure in the west. One thing is certain, however: the PC Engine plays host to some of the most important, kooky and genre-defining Japanese titles of the period.

System specs (Basic PC Engine)

CPU: Hu6280 (8bit)
CPU speed: 7.16MHz (1.5m instructions per second [MIPS])
Resolution: 400 x 270
Colours available: 512
Colours onscreen: 256
Maximum sprites: 64
Sprite size: 16 x 16, 32 x 64

State of play

Although not the first console to be featured in the movies, the PC Engine found fame in the 1998 film 'Enemy of the State' when the TurboExpress was used as a playback device for video captured onto a PCMCIA card. The TurboExpress was not shown working, but it made an appearance in several scenes throughout the film.

House of cards

The final system card add-on for the PC Engine was the incredible Arcade Card, which came out in Pro and Duo flavours. Arcade Card games featured more detailed graphics and effects, better sounds, and bigger and better cinemas and were designed specifically to host Neo-Geo ports as well as some of the system's best games such as *Sapphire*. The factory producing the Arcade Cards caught fire shortly before the planned release of the add-on delaying the release by some months. Some Engine fans cite this as a reason that the card was not supported as well as it might have been.

Engine upgrades

PC Engine has one of the most confusing hardware catalogues because there were simply so many iterations released. Here is the definitive **Edge** collector list of titles and descriptions of differences to clear things up for you once and for all.

NEC PC Engine/NEC TurboGrafx-16

The very first and most basic incarnation released in Japan on October 30, 1987 was a design triumph. The NEC TurboGrafx-16, the basic Japanese PC Engine with only a few minor internal modifications was billed as the first 16bit system to be released in the US causing advertising and playground wars across the country.

NEC PC Engine CD-ROM2

The CD-ROM2 unit for the PC Engine made the machine the very first console to utilise widespread CD-ROM data storage. The drive unit attached to the PC Engine via an Interface Unit, which also served as a carrying case.

PC Engine Super CD-ROM2

Released on December 31, 1991, this CD-ROM add-on allowed players to play the new Super CD format games that NEC were releasing on SuperGrafx. This upgrade unit could be used on the original PC Engine, CoreGrafx, CoreGrafx II and even the SuperGrafx system itself.





Tomio Gotoh, the man responsible for some of the very first DOS machines and the bas PC Engine, retired from NEC at 55 to become a contemporary video media artist



The CD-ROM2 was the first CD-ROM attachment for a Japanese console and helped start the FMV revolution



Magazines such as 'PC Engine Gekken' and 'Marakatsu' gave awa this game as prizes. But one sold on eBay last year for $1400 (£67

And, for collectors, the PC Engine is close to the ideal system. The games are of a generally high quality and come from many of the industry's formative heavyweights; Capcom, Taito, Irem, Namco and Hudson all developed excellent titles for the system. Prices vary across the collector's financial spectrum, ranging from the cheapest, most widely available titles to some of videogaming's most collectable objets d'art. And the system's heavy arcade bias, its success in Japan influencing the range of software as much as its failure in the west, means it offers some unique delights for those prepared to investigate.

In 1986 Japan's videogaming market was continuing to go from strength to strength. Having avoided the crash that crippled the US market, Nintendo's Famicom and Sega's Mark 3 (the west's Master System) were selling well, albeit starting to look technically basic. PC manufacturing giant NEC Home Electronics had been looking at the console market with keen interest and, noticing the decline in chip manufacturing costs, it commissioned one of its R&D teams to come up with a console design that could incorporate the technologies and lessons learned in the PC market with console gaming. Tomio Gotoh, one of NEC's top semiconductor engineers, was charged with steering the project, a project that insiders believed could lead to Nintendo's demise.

Gotoh-san had been responsible for some of the very first DOS machines (having retired from NEC at 55, he is now a contemporary video media artist) and his machine couldn't be faulted, technically. But NEC's problem was a lack of experience in the console arena. What was needed was inp from an established industry player, but NEC obviously couldn't take counsel from any of the rival hardware manufacturers. So Gotoh-san approached high-profile developer Hudson, a prolific thirdparty software company th had also been eyeing up the hardware market. Hudson was bitterly aware of the the kind of firstparty profits Nintendo w netting, and its engineers had even got as far as designing their own high-performance chipset.

But Hudson didn't have the necessary capital to get an entire hardware operation set up, so it decided to combine forces with NEC, splitting both the work and the risk. Although it's not known what percentage of effort and capi



The first PC Engine hardware iteration comes with the diminutive dimensions 135 x 130 x 35mm: the smallest home console ever



The TV tuner for the GT is very collectable. It was streets ahead of the Game Boy and used the same HuCard as the parent system

NEC PC Engine GT/NEC TurboExpress
With the growing success of Nintendo's Game Boy, NEC again broke new ground by providing the market with the first handheld console to mirror its home-based parent. The games on both the home and portable systems were interchangeable. The unit had many accessories such as a TV tuner and the TurboLink, which allowed two players to play against each other.

NEC PC Engine CoreGrafx
As PC Engine grew and grew in homeland popularity, NEC decided to release a tweaked version of the system for fans called the CoreGrafx complete with cosmetic changes and the addition of AV outputs.

NEC PC Engine CoreGrafx II
This is where it gets hard to keep up for the novice collector. Inexplicably NEC released the CoreGrafx II into the market just a very short time after the already tweaked original appended console had debuted.



In many respects this is the dream setup for the PC Engine enthusiast. The simple aesthetics of this system alone make it extremely desirable for the serious collector



The PC Engine hosts some of the best pre-Saturn shoot 'em ups. *Gunhed*, which was known as *Blazing Lasers* in the US, is a fine early example from 1989

each company put into the development and marketing, it's clear that both staked a lot on the venture, as their commitment to the system and each other never faltered throughout the nine years they were involved in the console hardware business.

For the first time in the Japanese videogame market, as much time, effort and money was spent on getting the design of the new console as right as the insides. NEC wanted a sleek small modern look to the machine, something that would resemble a portable walkman rather than a bulky console. The casing's dimensions were finally settled on at a slender 135 x 130 x 35mm, making it the smallest home console ever. Games were produced on HuCards, each of which had a massive (for the time) maximum capacity of 512Kb, while remaining about the size of a credit card. Everything screamed modern and new to the Japanese videogame consumer, and that goes some way to explaining the system's success.

But it was also down to the power of the system. Internally the PC Engine had a fearsome set of system specs; the powerful architecture was based on a custom version of the 6502 processor, the 7.16MHz Hu6280, along with 64Kb of VRAM. In addition, the system included four coprocessors in charge of sound and graphics allowing for an unprecedented 64 simultaneous sprites. With a variable resolution of 256 x 224 in most games (up to 384 x 256 in *R-Type*) and a potential of 256 onscreen colours from a palette bank of 512, graphics were clearly the machine's appeal when set against the limited visuals of the Famicom and Mark 3.

Indeed, the PC Engine's 16bit graphics processor helped it move sprites like no other machine outside of SNK's (yet-to-be released) Neo-Geo. Arguably that went some way to scuppering the doomed (Japanese) Mega Drive's chances before it was even released, as it sported a higher colour palette and more channels of sound than Sega's true 16bit machine. Curiously, it even featured several legitimate conversions of Sega's hit arcade titles such as *After Burner II* and *OutRun*.

Indeed, *OutRun*, *Thunder Blade* and *After Burner II* all gave a far better impression of super-scaler technology than the Mega Drive could manage. The exception to this rule was



In contrast to the sleek white design of the Japanese PC Engine, the US TurboGrafx-16 used cheaper black plastic and was blocky in the style of the time





Even more than usual, Japan saw a wide range of PC Engine system add-ons, such as the wireless multi-tap controller illustrated above, for example



Conversions of Sega arcade classics such as *OutRun* managed to find their way onto the Japanese iteration of the PC Engine and were often superior to Sega's own console ports

Golden Axe, which suffered a conversion so bad that the Mark 3 version is considered superior. Unsubstantiated Internet rumour, the gamers' equivalent of the urban legend, states that a financial incentive was offered to the game's programmers to make sure that their conversion was inferior to the one on Sega's machine.

But the most important factor in the PC Engine's Japanese success was not the thrill of the new, or the powerful system specifications, but the speed with which top-quality thirdparties jumped aboard the project. Irem, Taito, Namco, Human and Naxat Software all produced titles which went some way to wooing Japanese consumer support. With Hudson as a parent to the hardware, videogaming enthusiasts who might otherwise have been sceptical at NEC's lack of console credibility were able to pledge loyalty to the system without fear. Indeed, Saturn fans looking for a slightly earlier system to investigate would do well to turn to the PC Engine, with around 80 per cent of the system's software catalogue made up of shoot 'em ups and RPGs.

The marketing for the system was carefully planned, positioning the machine as a centre for a much larger entertainment system, with hardware add-ons to follow. NEC's original plan was to have the PC Engine forming the heart of a setup incorporating keyboard, disk-drive printer and CD player, but when the PC Engine launched on October 30, 1987, market research showed that Japanese consumers were confused and wanted a simple out-of-the-box console. Within months NEC had shelved most of the add-on plans, and concentrated on promoting the system as a standalone console. The change in direction was so successful that by the close of 1988 more Japanese consumers had purchased PC Engines than any other piece of hardware that year. Until the Super Famicom was released it continued to be the second best selling console in Japan.

And when NEC did release an add-on, in the shape of a CD-Rom drive in December '89, the PC Engine looked to be unstoppable. The CD-Rom unit hooked up to the original console transforming the machine into the world's first dedicated CD console. The increase in storage allowed the first streamed soundtracks to be added into games, as well as bringing the first true FMV sequences to be seen on a home console. The two machines were attached with a



The PC Engine version of *R-Type I* featured a new boss in stage six. Debate still rages over whether the PCE or Amiga version is superior



Cosmetic changes were apparent between the first and second CoreGrafx. The two systems were released very close to each other

NEC PC Engine Shuttle

Marketed as a designer model of the console, the Shuttle had no ports for a CD attachment making it a HuCard-only system. As such this is a system for completist collectors only. The unit was not as widely available as the CoreGrafx or CoreGrafx II systems, and so is worth more for that reason. The Shuttle did not have a way to back up its games since it didn't hook up to any of the CD-ROM attachments NEC released, so a backup unit was released for data storage.

NEC PC Engine Duo/TTI Turbo Duo

With so many systems that required linking together NEC at last decided to bring out a series of combined systems, the first of which was simply monikered the Duo and was released on September 21, 1991. Essentially a PC Engine and CD-ROM2 system in one case with extra memory for the new Super CD format, the system also had the option of being portable with an optional Duo Battery Pack.

NEC and Hudson had combined to form a new company, TTI, to market the PC Engine in the US. The Duo was released under its marketing and came packaged with software worth over $250 (£157) and other items, retailing for $299 (£188). Because the Duo was one single unit, access time was cut down on most of the games.

The portable monitor from NEC was released only in Japan for the PC Engine. Because of the original high price (around ¥85,000 (£450)) and short availability window, this unit only made it into a small fraction of homes. It is now one of the many PC Engine related items that are very hard to find.



The addition of AV outputs on the CoreGrafx attracts some collectors to its charms. Only completists will bother owning both the CoreGrafx and the CoreGrafx II, however



For ¥14,800 (£74) you could purchase the Virtual Cushion and feel your way through the games. Edge has only come across one or two more ridiculous peripherals since

docking bay interface which locked them together, and it even came with a protective cover to make the console easily portable. Yet the system had a hard road to travel as far as the US was concerned.

NEC's plans to bring the PC Engine to the US began early. The NES was the number one system at the time, just like in Japan; games were no longer being made for Atari's 7800 and the Sega Master System had failed to win over the majority of US gamers. But the increasing gulf between NES games and what was being seen in arcades had created the perfect gap for a new system to step into. Indeed, with NEC's huge popularity in Japan, the climate looked perfect for PC Engine to enter – and, eventually, dominate – the US. But Sega had other ideas.

Shortly after NEC announced its intention to bring the PC Engine, renamed as the TurboGrafx-16 (TG-16), to the US, Sega announced that its Mega Drive system would also be arriving in the west. Its system had been failing in Japan thanks to PC Engine's huge installed userbase, and it was determined to fashion a different result abroad. In its favour, NEC wasn't a household name in the US, and neither was Hudson, yet to make its name on the back of *Bomberman* (a game which, predictably, has one of its finest versions on the PC Engine). The battle for hearts and minds was on.

Sega's renamed Genesis was released six months after the TG-16, and the marketing budget for both machines was huge, ensuring a quick burst of sales. However, NEC's US wing soon began to make some grave mistakes.

Genesis came bundled with *Altered Beast* which, while mediocre, was significantly superior to the TG-16's pack-in game, *Keith Courage in Alpha Zones*. And catty Sega soon highlighted the fact that the TG-16's 8bit CPU meant it wasn't a true 16bit system. Meaningless, maybe, but NEC failed to counter the criticism and its machine, originally so rooted in the thrill of the new, began to give off a scent of the old.

But that wasn't the end of the errors. Hudson kicked its console advertising off with a series of commercials that barely featured the system, causing many gamers to think the games on offer were for Nintendo systems. Some critics also cite the change of name from PC Engine to TurboGrafx as confusing for those who had been following the system's Japanese success, although anyone dedicated enough to



The Shuttle system's sleek design meant it was marketed as a designer system in Japan. The inexplicable lack of CD compatibility ports render it a HuCard-only system

NEC PC Engine SuperGrafx
Right at the height of PC Engine's success in 1990, NEC nearly spoiled everything by releasing this curious system specifically for show against Nintendo's Super Famicom. The console was more graphically advanced than the original using a 68516 processor and offering twice as much video memory but after just a short time on the market NEC stopped production. The machine can play PC Engine titles as well as the scant SG catalogue (only five native titles made it to release). In fact, with the right add-ons this is the only PC Engine that can play every PC Engine game and for this reason it is a collectable system both in Japan and the west.

NEC PC Engine Duo-R
Almost three years after the PC Engine Duo's first found success, NEC released this less expensive white-coloured system on March 25, 1993. For once the changes were significant with the headphone jack on the side of the system being removed, as well as the battery pack option. The case was changed to a more streamlined design and feels more sturdy compared to the original black plastic Duo.





The special version of *Soldier Blade* only ran for three minutes as it was intended for competition play at computer shows in Japan

follow the progress of a machine in Japan would probably be aware of something as simple as a piece of rebranding. But those same people wouldn't have been happy at the redesign, cosmetic changes taking the internals from Japan's sleek diminutive unit and bundling them in a block piece of plastic.

And if all that wasn't enough, the pricing of the systems appeared to be some way off competitiveness, too. The standard HuCard unit debuted at $200 (£125), but the CD attachment, which arrived in 1990, went for $400 (£250). At $600 (£375) you could own a Neo-Geo home system for the same price. The PCE GT portable (NEC's answer to the Game Boy, see Engine upgrades) also made its way over in 1991 as the TurboExpress, but at a disastrous $300 (£188), it was never going to provide more than a curio for western gamers.

NEC was also exceptionally slow at bringing its Japanese titles over to the US, while Sega stormed ahead with slick precision. Despite its policy of releasing only the 'best of the best' Japanese games (such as the *Bonk* series and *Military Madness*), NEC made some exceptionally poor decisions in picking up certain titles and ignoring others. Nintendo's exclusive licensing policy hurt the company, too, as any titles that were already available on NES were barred from being released on any other game system. This infamous policy was quickly ruled illegal, but the ruling came after the most important formative stages of the TG-16's development, and affected it in a way that was very close to home.

Prior to PC Engine, Hudson had been most famous for its hugely successfully Famicom titles and the fact that the company couldn't release its most popular games on its own system was devastating. Not only that, but the company couldn't afford to only release new titles on PC Engine/TG-16 by this point, as it needed the huge NES userbase to bring in the profits. Software for the CD add-on was in short supply, too: although there were hundreds of CD-ROM titles in Japan, it took a substantial amount of time and effort to translate them, and since time was the one thing the now-struggling system didn't have, many of the great PC Engine RPGs were passed over. So while western gamers saw the likes of *Ys* and *Lords of Thunder*, magical titles such as *Far East of Eden*, *Spriggan*, *Snatcher* and the pinnacle of



Very hard to find, the PC Engine Duo monitor sold for around ¥85,000 (£450) and was only available for a short time on Japanese shelves



The LT was marketed as 'portable' but it couldn't run off batteries. It could be added to the CD-ROM2 unit for a behemoth of a 'handheld'



The first of the PC Engine super consoles containing all the hardware of the HuCard and CD-ROM units in one machine. There is no need for system cards with the Duo



The SuperGrafx's release came as a complete shock in 1990. The six specific games for the system are: *Aldynes*, *Battle Ace*, *Darius Plus*, *1941*, *Granzort* and *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*

Konami's pre-32bit era *Castlevania* title *Dracula X* were sadly left behind.

While NEC's chances in the US looked to be over, the opposite was true in Japan where on September 21, 1991, the company released the PC Engine Duo. Essentially a PC Engine and CD-ROM2 system in one case, with extra memory for the new Super CD format, the release of the system was timed to perfection, capitalising on PC Engine's growing popularity and library of triple-A titles. NEC and Hudson decided that this new system would give them one last chance to break the US and Europe (where the system had been virtually ignored). NEC attempted to start afresh, and created a subsidiary, TTI (Turbo Technologies Inc) made up of staff from both NEC and Hudson Soft. TTI was charged with the task of distributing the new Duo system, which had quickly become a smash hit in Japan.

With the increased memory capacity of the built-in System Card 3.0, which allowed the TG-16+CD to play the newer, Duo CD games, and a reduced the price point to $200 (£125), TTI began an aggressive advertising campaign for the Duo. The comic-style ads featured 'Johnny Turbo', a freelance crime fighter who was determined to crush the evil forces of 'Feka'. The adverts were thinly veiled attacks on Sega which was about to launch the Sega CD add-on. NEC was arguing that the Duo was the only true all-in-one card/CD gaming system as the Sega CD required the Mega Drive to work. Johnny Turbo leapt to the rescue, eliminating the Feka baddies and spreading the word that the Turbo Duo was the world's only complete CD gaming system. However, next to Sega's famous 'scream' ad campaign TTI's marketing strategy looked petty and misguided, tarnishing this new company's image not because of a lack of quality software but rather through playground-style bitchiness.

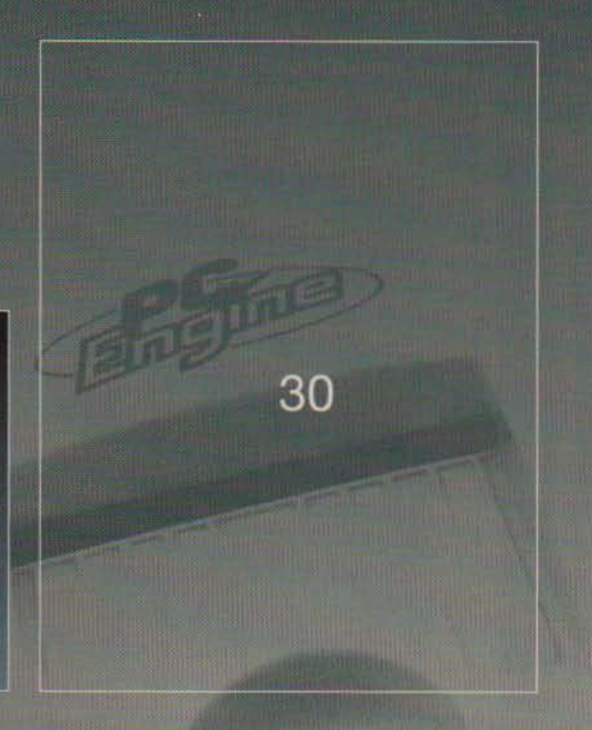
And all of this cross-continent multi-company lineage means that building a vast knowledge of PC Engine games and collectables is far harder than with most systems. **Edge** spoke to **Hani Ghattas**, a 26-year-old barrister based in Los Angeles, and one of America's most knowledgeable collectors of the system. Originally a Mega Drive aficionado, the extreme competition between the systems in the early-'90s led to Ghattas investigating the PC Engine. Recently, he's begun to build up a vast collection, the sort only an

NEC PC Engine Duo-RX

The very last of the PC Engine systems based on the original 1987 technologies came shortly after the Duo-R on June 24, 1994. It had all the same features as the Duo-R, with the addition of a six-button controller (very similar to the later PC-FX control pad), and a few cosmetic changes to the case.

NEC PC Engine LT

Often referred to as the Rolls Royce of all handheld consoles, the LT is in fact the most desirable of all the PC Engine hardware iterations. Released on the same day as the Duo the LT is the largest cartridge/CD portable system ever made. The LT alone is a fully functional HuCard unit with a four-inch screen, built-in speakers and CD support. Recently, the systems were reduced in price, for clearance in Japan explaining the sudden influx of machines into the market over the last couple of years.





The karaoke system fits perfectly under the interface. The set ca
with two speakers and a mixer but the microphone was separat



The arcade Pro card was released very late into the system's life to give a power boost in the light of the newer Sega and Nintendo systems



The Duo-R system was a stripped-down version of the Duo designed to cut production costs, and is therefore somewhat less desirable than the earlier iteration

attorney's salary could allow. **Edge** begins by asking how his obsession has developed.

"Videogame collecting is like an addiction," says Ghattas, "And just like any other addiction, it starts slowly. I began reading up on the PC Engine to know what system I wanted and which games to start with. As I began to expand my collection I scoured the globe for dealers who could feed the PC Engine monster I was becoming. I found the few hardcore TurboGrafx/PC Engine fan sites and joined the boards, sharing information on the system. As time went on I bought every PC Engine game I could get my hands on using my contacts in Japan, Hong Kong, England, and other places to secure games for resale. The advent of eBay has obviously helped feed the PC Engine craze."

Edge wonders what in Ghattas' view kept the system on the Japanese market for so long? "Quality. The PC Engine was a triumph of gameplay over graphics. During the early-'90s console graphics weren't really that advanced so by necessity gameplay sold the game. There also wasn't the big licence industry influence on gaming that there is today. To date, no ninja game has approached the sheer brilliance of *Kaze Kiri*, save perhaps *Revenge of Shinobi* on the Mega Drive. Brilliant shooters like *Nexzr*, *Sapphire*, *Cotton* and the *Star Soldier* series will satiate any shooter fan. Roleplaying brought us the classic *Ys* series, *Cosmic Fantasy* and the like. Platform games include the now legendary *Valis* series that took advantage of CD power and *Shubibinman 3*. Last, but not least are the action games – *Kaze Kiri Ninja Action*, *Iga Ninden Gaou* and *Double Dragon II* kept me and legions of gamers enthralled for hours."

In the light of these gameplay successes **Edge** asks Ghattas to offer his opinion on why the system bombed in the west. "It was a combination of two factors: the marketing incompetence of NEC and the mindset of western gamers. The PC Engine simply never gained the market penetration of Sega and Nintendo consoles. To compete with mascots Mario for Nintendo and Sonic for Sega, NEC rolled out Bonk, a hero with a tumour for a head. The promise of quality games coming to America went largely unfulfilled as numerous grade-A titles never made it to western shores. Perhaps the most egregious example being *Dracula X*, a triple-A title, which wasn't localised due to some asinine



Often referred to as the forgotten *Street Fighter*, the PC Engine release competently holds its own against the more famous SNES and Mega Drive versions



A host of official and unofficial pads are available to the Japanese collector. This official *Street Fighter* pad complements the game wonderfully



The final PC Engine Duo, the Duo-RX, comes complete with a six-button pad almost identical to that seen in NEC's doomed PC-FX console



The Super CD-ROM2 is the most versatile of the PC Engine's CD-based peripherals as it works with all the linkable systems, unlike its precursor

dispute between TTI and Konami. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, was the lack of thirdparty support in the US, which killed the viability of the system in the eyes of western gamers. While US gamers were playing *Mortal Kombat*, EA Sports titles refreshed yearly, and *Street Fighter II*, Duo owners got to party down with *World Class Tennis* and *Riot Zone*. The US PC Engine saw a release of a total of 138 games over its lifespan, many times less than the Genesis or the Super Nintendo."

So which are the rarest titles in Ghattas' experience? "*Darius Alpha* is by far the rarest 'commercial' release for the PC Engine. Only 800 copies of this game were put in the hands of Japanese consumers who purchased the Turbo Duo game *Super Darius* and the hybrid SuperGrafx/PC Engine HuCard *Darius Plus* and sent in the UPCs from both games. An additional number of copies, numbering not more than 200, were given away as promotional items in Japan. Unfortunately, the west didn't see much in the way of collectable items outside of limited print games like *Magical Chase* and *Bonk III* on CD [which is currently selling for up to £400]. On the hardware side the most collectable items are the PAL PC Engine, the PC Engine *R-Type* bundle console, and the Kisado converter (which allows you to play Japanese HuCards on a US system). The most famous prototype is the rumoured 2–3 stage *Strider* on the SuperGrafx."

The appeal of PC Engine collecting is partly based on the underdog mentality surrounding the system in the west, but it's also somewhat rooted in the excitement of archaeology. To date, outside of cover scans or names a large portion of the PC Engine library remains undiscovered. It is the challenge of finding these hidden gems that makes PC Engine collecting so enjoyable. Adding to the challenge is that even the better-known games are quite difficult and often near impossible to find in mint and complete condition. It's an elite class within a class. You want *Psychic Assassin Taromaru* on Sega Saturn? You could get it within the week if you can pay the price. But games like *Rayxanber III*, *Nexzr* or *Iga Ninden Gaou* are among the most hardest to obtain on any format. You can start hyperventilating again now, but save your biggest gasps for when you start collecting and see your next credit card bill.

The Collectables

Here **Edge** has listed the best playable collectables. There are many other rare but unplayable titles that fetch high prices from those involved in the hardcore area of the collecting scene.

Pricing is based upon mint and complete copies with spine card, registration card and any applicable inserts. The guide has been produced with the help of Hani Ghattas and Chris Foulger.

Darius Alpha





Value: £600–700
Release: 1990
Developer/Publisher: Taito

The rarest non-prototype release (see main text). A *Darius* take on the boss battle after boss battle mentality of *Alien Soldier*. The pride of any collector's library.

Sylphia





Value: £175
Release: 22/10/93
Developer/Publisher: Tonkin House

A brilliant shooter that takes the standard Compile formula seen in *Aleste* and *Spriggan* while adding a refreshing mythological theme and tight gameplay. Exceedingly rare.

Dracula X (Akumajo Dracula X: Chi No Rondo)



Value: £100–125
Release: 29/10/93
Developer/Publisher: Konami

Astounding graphics and classic gameplay make this an experience that any *Castlevania* fan cannot miss. Not rare but demand in Japan and abroad keeps the price high.

Kaze Kiri: Ninja Action





Value: £100
Release: 28/04/94
Developer/Publisher: Naxat

Ninja action at its best and a serious threat to *Revenge of Shinobi*. Tight control and a plethora of moves is iced by a series of fantastic bosses.

Ginga Fukei Densetsu Sapphire





Value: £300–350
Release: 24/11/95
Developer/Publisher: Hudson

A technical marvel, it wasn't released commercially but handed out at a game show. The release was later canned due to the demise of the PC Engine. Beware counterfeits.

Steam Heart's: the Crying Game





Value: £100–110
Release: 22/03/96
Developer/Publisher: TGL

Much maligned, this hentai title was heavily edited (the PC version reveals the pilot to have an appendage normally foreign to the female body).

Rayxanber III





Value: £100
Release: 26/06/92
Developer/Publisher: Data West

Nothing like its disappointing prequel, *Rayxanber III* is rare and features great control, lush graphics, and is great fun for any shooter fan.

Nexzr





Value: £40–60
Release: 11/12/92
Developer/Publisher: Naxat

Existing both as a regular version and a *Summer Carnival '93* release (adding in Time and Boss Attack modes) this is extremely challenging.

1941





Value: £125
Release: 23/08/91
Developer/Publisher: Hudson

The definitive home conversion of the classic shooter. And one of the hardest PC Engine games to get in mint condition.

Winds/Lords of Thunder





Value: £40–50
Release: 23/04/93
Developer/ Publisher: Hudson

Superior in almost every way to its predecessor, *Gate of Thunder*, *Lords of Thunder* is a pleasure to play and boasts an excellent rock soundtrack.

Ys I & II





Value: £20–30
Release: 21/12/89
Developer/Publisher: Hudson

The best of the reasonably priced rarities. One of the classic roleplaying games, albeit derivative, with innovative action and a stunning CD soundtrack.

Shubibinman 2





Value: £40–55
Release: 27/04/91
Developer/Publisher: NCS

Platforming action at its finest. Along with *Valis IV* it doesn't often get much better than this.

Star Parodia





Value: £50–60
Release: 24/04/92
Developer/Publisher: Hudson

Ostensibly a humour-filled vertical-scrolling shooter, the game features player craft from *Bomberman*, *Star Soldier* and even a PC Engine.

Ninja Gaiden





Value: £50–65
Release: 24/01/92
Developer/Publisher: Hudson

A conversion of the NES, and not the arcade, game. The same tight control found in the NES version, but with superior graphics and a ramped up difficulty level.

Soldier Blade





Value: £50–75
Release: 10/07/92
Developer/Publisher: Hudson

The finale of the *Star Soldier* series, programmed by noted dev house Red, unbelievably runs on a HuCard. This game takes the series out on a victorious high note.

Macross 2036



Value: £60–70
Release: 03/04/92
Developer/Publisher: NCS

While many collectors dislike some of the *Macross* titles, this is a clear exception. An essential part of any self-respecting gamer's collection.

Ghouls 'n Ghosts (Daimakaimura)





Value: £50
Release: 27/07/90
Developer/Publisher: NEC

The SuperGrafx premiere home conversion of this classic platformer is even better than the outstanding Mega Drive revision.

Splatterhouse





Value: £40
Release: 03/04/90
Developer/Publisher: Namco

The best conversion (outside of the rare Marty version) of this legendary game. The Japanese version features all the gore of the arcade game.

Spriggan





Value: £50–70
Release: 12/07/91
Developer/Publisher: Compile

Compile magic at its finest. Takes the basic *Aleste* formula and adds some interesting and enjoyable weapon ideas.

Magical Chase





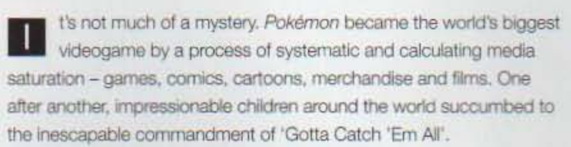
Value: £60–80
Release: 15/11/91
Developer/Publisher: Palsoft/Quest

Help Ripple the witch apprentice recapture demons she accidentally released into the world, or she'll be turned into a frog by her teacher.



It's super effective!

A few years have passed since Edge was last word-perfect on the Pokérap. Long enough, perhaps, to gain some perspective on the question of just how a bug-catching sim managed to capture the whole world's attention…



It's not much of a mystery. *Pokémon* became the world's biggest videogame by a process of systematic and calculating media saturation – games, comics, cartoons, merchandise and films. One after another, impressionable children around the world succumbed to the inescapable commandment of 'Gotta Catch 'Em All'.

Except of course, that's not how it happened. The game came first, and everything that followed was born out of the fervour that it inspired. In which case, the causes of the Pokémon Phenomenon must be sought in the game, not the hype explosion that followed it.

But weren't the games the most cynical plot of all, each new release dazzling children into a pester-frenzy with little more than a change of boxart? There's no denying that the first four games – *Green* (Japan only), *Red*, *Blue* and *Yellow* were essentially identical. *Gold*, *Silver* and *Crystal* introduced such innovations as Pokémon breeding and the realtime clock, but were in essence another helping of the same. And so the real Pokémystery becomes: just how good does a game have to be before you can successfully re-release it seven times in a row?



Confuse ray

One of the reasons the success of the series is rarely pinned on the quality of the games is because they are assumed to be simplistic, both structurally and graphically. Battles based on the tired old elemental system? Pixelly little creatures? Look again.

For a start there are 17 different elements. No amount of scissors-paper-stone guesswork is going to tell you whether Steel types are vulnerable to Ghosts, or if Bugs stand a chance against Dragons. Especially since elemental types have a range of four levels of power against each other, ranging through super effective, effective, not very effective, and no effect at all. Oh, did **Edge** mention that there are hybrid Pokémon, who share the characteristics of two classes? They might be tricky, if it wasn't for the fact that each attack move has an elemental component, and Pokémon can master a wide range of moves from outside their class. Which means that you can find yourself with a Steel Pokémon, armed with both Steel and Ground moves, facing a Flying/Grass hybrid who also seems to know Fighting type attacks. **Edge** knows where it's placing its bets, but only because it has a sheet of graph paper and a sharp pencil.

While the elemental system is initially baffling, it is far from random. Rather than simply being a complication glossed over the top of the game to increase its longevity, it is an integral part of character design. Water attacks are super effective against Numels, not because it says so on the stat sheet, but because it cools and cakes the lava in their veins, leaving them rigid and defenceless. Players don't need a Prima guide to guess that they don't want to try a leech attack on Gulpin, the poisonous stomach Pokémon.

"Each defeat at the hand of some omnipotent behemoth – and there are many since Pokémon is rather hard – is sweetened by the thought 'Just wait till I get me one of those!'"



Sunny day

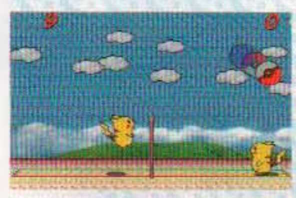
Pokémon is also marked out by its setting. It's rare for RPGs to inhabit such a recognisable world. Sanitised it may be, but *Pokémon* is a familiar world of backpacks, bicycles and mobile phones. Cities may have battle towers and secret basements, but they also have supermarkets and police stations.

If the attraction of roleplaying games lies in the opportunity they offer the player to assume the identity of the hero, then *Pokémon* requires a lesser suspension of disbelief than most. There is no epic backstory. Ash isn't a dethroned prince, no meteor has smashed into his village, rumours do not abound that someone is trying to break the seal on the Ancient Evil. He just wants to be a Pokémon trainer. And so do you. It's one of the reasons the merchandising proved so popular. Ash has a Pokédex, you have a GBA. He tugs his Pokéball baseball cap on as he leaves the house: so can you. Just because yours was made in a sweatshop and his was embroidered by his mum doesn't mean you don't feel the part.

But the central strength of the *Pokémon* world is that there is no us and them. Unusually for an RPG, there are no enemies. Every battle you have is against creatures who could just as well be on your side. It means that each slamming defeat at the hand of some omnipotent behemoth – and there are many, since another of *Pokémon*'s aces is that it is actually rather hard – is sweetened by the thought "Just wait till I get me one of those!" The rule of RPG thumb is that you play as an alien, wandering a strange and hostile world, where each monster is more venomous and bizarre than the last. In *Pokémon* you belong. Fought in anger only rarely, battles are as much about maintaining the natural balance there would be in the wild, as about slapping down a cocky Geodude.

Homebrew

As well as recipes, pornography, origami, knitting patterns, carvings and what is unquestionably the worst fan-art ever drawn, *Pokémon* has inspired a number of homebrew games. Sadly, the infamous *PokéSnipe*, which encouraged you to gun down defenceless Pikachus is no longer available.













The future

Pokéfever may have abated, but Nintendo has plenty more adventures to sell

Pokémon Colosseum

Format: **GameCube**
Release: **December (US), 2004 (UK)**

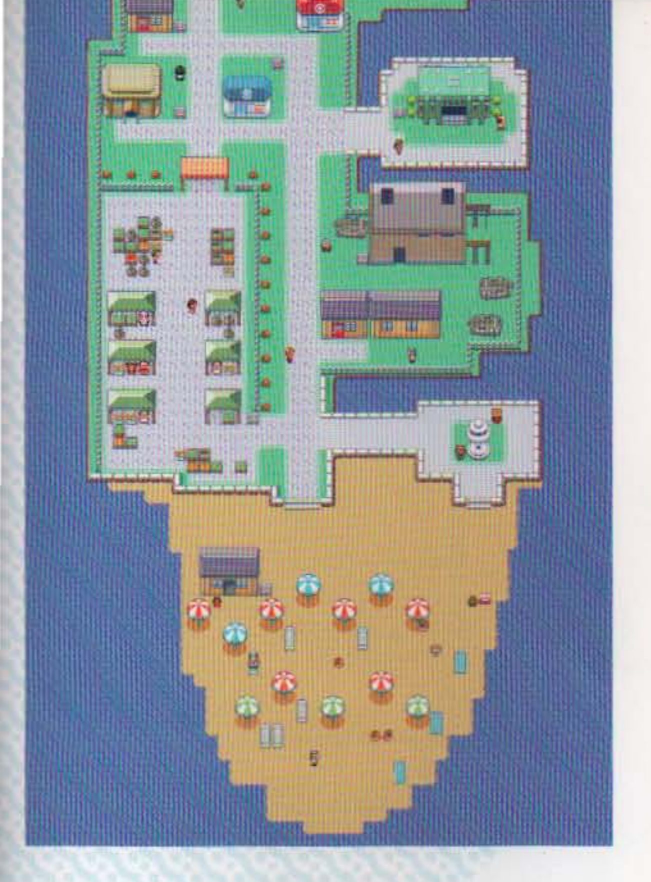
The GameCube follow-up to *Pokémon Stadium*, which allowed you to upload your Game Boy saves and battle on the big screen. Both *Box* and *Colosseum* have been timed poorly, lagging far behind the GBA games they are designed to complement. When *Colosseum* is released, Nintendo will have to hope the GBA Player hasn't already made a separate game redundant.

Pokémon Pinball Ruby/Sapphire

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Release: **November (UK)**



This update of the Game Boy Color pinball game will be going head to head with *Pinball of the Dead*, the latest demented twist in *The House of the Dead* series. Two more stylistically opposed takes on the same game could hardly be imagined. *Pokémon Pinball* plays it straight and cute, but Sega's version may have the gameplay edge.





Lovely kiss

But how can a rock with arms be cocky? *Pokémon*'s other secret weapon is the exuberance and effort that goes into the character design. Nine games, and 386 Pokémon in, the names, noises and natural histories of the creatures are as engaging as ever. The design work is more than an endurance test, Pokémon have to be believable as wild animals, and evolutions – so central to the excitement of the game – need to surprise and satisfy in equal measure.

The cartoons weren't a cash-in, they were a sensitive expansion of the miniature world evolving inside 12m Game Boys around the world. It was in the characterisation of the Pokémon themselves that the cartoon series was a killer marketing blow. Not because it helped the brand-name seep into the subconscious of Sugar Puff-addled schoolkids, but because it gave enormous scope for communicating the characters of the monosyllabic creatures.

Jigglypuff on a Game Boy screen is a flat pink disk that squeaks. Let loose in Viridian City he has a personality as charmingly and irrevocably flawed as those of respected literary creations. Useless in battle, he earns the contempt and exasperation of those around him. His sights instead are set on stardom, and the slightest resemblance in his surroundings to a stage or a spotlight galvanises him to whip out a microphone and come into his own. Tragically, his singing is offensively soporific, and just as he has a chance to reveal to his resentful companions his true talents, every last one falls into an utter sleep. Jigglypuff surveys his comatose audience with a cold, flat eye and then wreaks his revenge. Armed with a hidden marker pen, he defaces everyone, human and Pokémon alike – Pikachu with a Hitler moustache, Ash with Groucho specs – in a frenzy of vandalism. They awake to an innocent looking pink blob, with no memory of previous events, which allows the repetition of the gag throughout the story.

Similarly affecting is the story of Cubone, discovered to be an orphan, who after seeing his mother killed, wears her skull as a helmet to protect him as he fights to avenge her death. Sobering stuff. Or the agony of the Nosepass, whose enormous hooter perpetually points north, meaning it can never see the face of one of its own kind.

It is little wonder that, in the face of such vitality and ingenuity, fans of the television series were eager to buy into a game which would allow them to meet and befriend these characters. It is easy to accuse Nintendo of exploitative cynicism when it re-badged the *Red/Blue* games as *Yellow*, with the only major change being that Pikachu followed you onscreen, rather than just being one more creature you could consign to the Pokébank. But the quality of the characterisation achieved by the cartoon had given fans such a rapport with the creature that this alone was enough to delight them.



Millennium madness

Pokémon's success attracted an equal measure of controversy. After accusations that the cartoons caused seizures and the games promoted occult heresies such as Darwinism, hysteria reached its highest pitch over the course of the year 2000...

March 2000
A school in California pays compensation of $1,500 (£938) to a pupil after his confiscated Pokémon cards were lost. After the verdict, the boy said he would use the money "to get more Pokémon cards." Yamauchi-san would be proud.

April 2000
An eight-year-old boy offers his baby sister in exchange for a rare Vaporeon card in a radio swap-shop in Hampshire. In his defence, it was the super-rare holographic version.

July 2000
Deprived children at some London primary schools invent their own version of the Pokémon card game using prostitute calling cards collected from phone boxes.

November 2000
"Nintendo turned me into an evil, occult Pokémon character," says **Uri Geller**, as he begins court proceedings against the company, on the grounds that it had used his name, identity and signature image of a bent spoon. He further asserts that the star and lightning bolt devices on the character were a reference to the activities of the Nazi SS during World War II. Nintendo fights the action on the grounds he looked nothing like Bellsprout.

February 2001
A Mexican priest calls for the burning of toys and cards, which he claims carry subversive messages which would corrupt the family unit. Over 200 children bring their Pokémon cards and toys to a church in the Mexican state of Hidalgo which, ironically, shares its name with Pokémon #186, the evolved form of Hidini.

April 2001
Islamic states issue a series of copycat fatwas, attempting to outdo each other in the inventiveness of their reasoning. In the United Arab Emirates, *Pokémon* is outlawed as it promotes gambling and violence. Qatar follows suit, in an effort to "preserve our children, their faith, their morale and their money." Saudi objections are based on the fact that the cards carry religious symbols, such as crosses and triangles, which are significant to Free Masons. **Edge** is amazed Sony has got away with it for so long.

Pokémon Channel

Format: **GameCube**
Release: **Out now (Japan), 2004 (UK)**



Along with your trusty Pikachu, you must run a Pokémon television channel. Travelling the world – at a leisurely and battle-free pace – you film Pokémon, and recruit them to present the news and the weather. Minigames, colouring books and exclusive episodes of the 'Pichu Bros' cartoon are also included.

Pokémon Box

Format: **GameCube**
Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



More a utility than a game, this budget-priced package will go on sale with a GBA link cable and a special *Ruby/Sapphire* memory card. Containing holding space for 1,500 Pokémon, it allows true obsessives to store and sort their animal army. The disk will contain a full version of the GBA game, so those without a GBA Player can upload their saves through a link cable, and play full size.



Pay day

In a process that **Edge** has only recently discovered is called 'brand extension', the Pokémon name was rapidly smeared across a wider range of genres. However, rather than indiscriminately daubing it over any lacklustre title needing a boost, Nintendo used it to push some remarkably innovative products. *Pokémon Stadium* (N64) was one of the few games to take advantage of Game Boy link-up, and the possibility it offered – that of seeing your tiny pixellated friends emerge as fully-fleshed warriors – was like nothing else before. *Hey You, Pikachu!* (N64) allowed primitive voice communication with the mercurial rat, and produced a rather cheerier experience than the faintly disturbing *Seaman* (Dreamcast). *Pokémon Snap* (N64), with its totally pacifist gameplay, answered the critics who opposed *Pokémon*'s supposed violent nature.

Hardware innovations followed. Pokémon Pikachu was a Tamagotchi-style device which used a pedometer to convert each step taken into watts for the your pet Pika to feed on. It was a canny piece of design: the motion requirement silenced parents who objected to the sedentary nature of videogames but it also harmonised perfectly with what the children knew of the gameworld, where eggs and other items were affected by the number of steps taken.

Not all *Pokémon* releases were so ingenious. But where they were an exercise in more conventional branding, Nintendo took care to apply the name only to quality games. *Pokémon Puzzle League* (N64, *Puzzle Challenge* on the GBC) added a new layer of branding wallpaper to a game which had already been repeatedly sexed-up by Nintendo's trademark department. Released as *Tetris Attack* on the SNES, despite having nothing to do with *Tetris*, and being fronted by Yoshi and friends, it was similarly unconnected to the *Pokémon* world. None of these indignities did anything to dim the simple brilliance of the game, however, and it remains one of the finest puzzlers for either system.

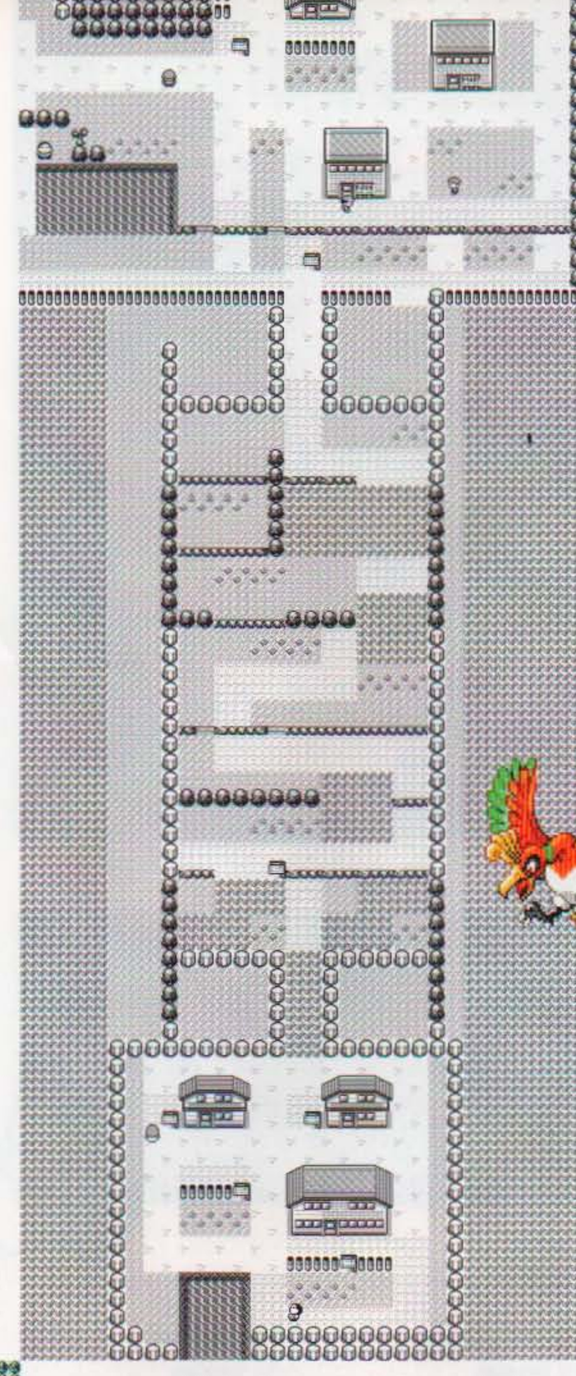
Pokémon Pinball seemed more of a branding stretch, but the use of a Pokéball and tables made up of burrows and caves in which Pokémon were hiding, provided the coherence that shifted the game away from being a shallow cash-in.

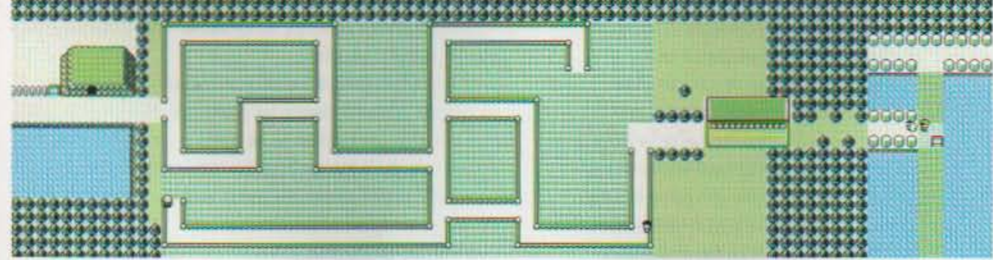


Baton pass

In the *Pokémon* games, Ash's rival is Gary. Older and more advanced, Gary is always just ahead of Ash, who follows doggedly determined to one day catch and best his old adversary. An old story, but one which hides a twist. In the original Japanese, Ash is named Satoshi after the series' creator, Satoshi Tajiri. For his rival's name he chose Shigeru, appropriate for a man whose first venture was a fanzine ('Game Freak') which published tips for Miyamoto-san titles such as *Donkey Kong*. The message Tajiri-san conveys by having his alter ego follow in the footsteps of Shigeru is clear.

For many, Miyamoto-san's work represents Nintendo at its best: imaginative, inventive, pursuing excellence at any cost. *Pokémon*, on the other hand, is seen as the vanguard of the Evil Nintendo – exploitative, cynical and greedy. But whatever the ethics of the *Pokémon* boom, it is unjust to belittle Tajiri-san's achievement of making games worthy of rival, and his ambition to one day outshine him.

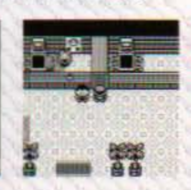




"For many, Miyamoto-san's work represents Nintendo at its best: imaginative, inventive. Pokémon, on the other hand, is seen as the vanguard of the Evil Nintendo – exploitative, cynical and greedy"

Pokémon is trying to evolve

Although Ash's world has hardly changed, each generation has brought a little more colour and clarity to his environments

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Scores broadly correspond to the following sentiments: zero: nothing, one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Edge's most played

GTA Vice City

The city of vice has lured **Edge** back. Thousands of miles have been driven, hundreds of gang members shot, tens of innocent lives lost. Much work remains.



(PlayStation2) Rockstar Games

Shadows of Undrentide

The first proper expansion for *Neverwinter Nights* allowed **Edge** to whet its appetite before next issue's review of BioWare's *Knights of the Old Republic*.



(PC) Atari

Frequency

The unblinking agony of trying to perfect Expert scores has revealed to **Edge** just how dependent it has become on *Amplitude*'s kindly green arrow.



(PlayStation2) SCEE

Indy Car Series

Edge dons its anorak and calls itself Nigel for the most authentic sim on console. You don't know agony until you've over factored your toe-in ratio on the final race.



(PlayStation2) Codemasters

Gamer's republic

Why revolution will just have to wait

The big news this month: *Republic: The Revolution* is delayed. To regular readers that's hardly a revelation. Demis Hassabis once wrote a column in **Edge** – you may remember it – called 'The trials of a startup developer'. Part one appeared in **E**63, which curiously enough is the issue featured in this month's Reset (see p112).

Now, we're all aware that *Republic*'s release date has been more slippery than a buttered eel, so we're not about to deliver any more cheap shots – *five years!* – that would be unfair. But seriously, Hassabis deserves some credit. This is someone who built his own company from the ground up because he wanted to create fresh game concepts, not soul-sapping expansion packs for Bullfrog. And it's not like he was *that* loaded. Elixir was founded on the back of his reputation and treks up big escalators at Canary Wharf. Hopefully *Republic* will make Elixir some money, although **Edge** suspects Hassabis has less control over his company than he did all those years ago...

Republic 'review' code did come in, and approximately two weeks before the magazine's deadline. Plenty of time to explore the intricacies of the game. Unfortunately, the 'review' code was incomplete. It lacked a manual, a tutorial and the opening number-crunching sequence of the game was buggy. These aspects, we were assured, would be fixed before the game went gold in a few days time. We couldn't take the risk. It's important that we review the same game that you find inside your box. In all likelihood, **Edge** will be playing a retail version of the game in time for next month's issue.

If you'll forgive the crunching Les Dennis-style link, **Edge** was also looking forward to BioWare's *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. Sadly, it arrived a few days too late. Unlike Elixir's game, it was the finished article, but frankly, we wanted to play it for days and days – for professional reasons you understand, not just because it's shaping up to be the release of the summer.

The licence may give it more clout at retail than Elixir's title, but in its own way *KotOR* is just as experimental, bringing *Baldur's Gate*-esque combat and party mechanics to the console market. It will certainly be interesting to see which comes out on top. Expect both games in a bumper Testscreen section in **E**128.













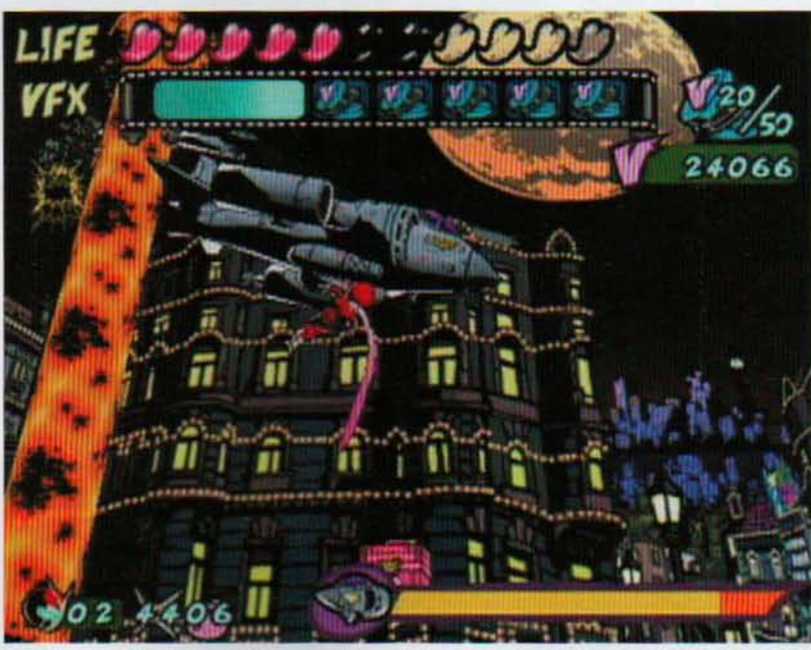
Viewtiful Joe

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house (Team Viewtiful)** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), November (UK)**





Dodging incoming attacks unbalances enemies, who can then be used as projectiles while time is slowed, to take out several other targets





Viewtiful Joe is a game that evokes a whole gamut of emotions. It starts with joy and elation, as the opening screen, consisting of the Team Viewtiful logo, gives way to Viewtiful Joe himself, dashing onscreen to speedily signpost the game's quirky and confident sense of style and inventiveness. It carries on through delight and rapture as the opening cut-scene depicts our hero Joe being literally drawn into a world of B-movie menace in a bid to rescue his girl. And then it transforms into amazement and awe as the side-scrolling mechanics and judiciously balanced progression of early levels draws you into Joe's world.

"When you reach the end (having cursed your way through often unbearably arbitrary level design) the sense of satisfaction is exceptional"

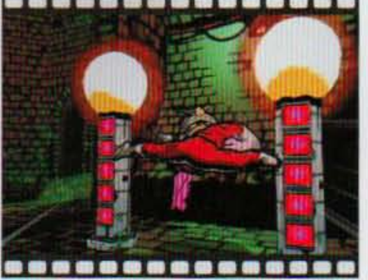
But at some point, these joyous emotions eventually give way to despair and frustration as it becomes necessary to get to grips with the game's idiosyncratic logic, and deal with the astronomical difficulty level of later stages. It's important, though, to stick with the game during these bleak periods. Because when you do eventually reach the end (having probably cursed your way vehemently through level design that seems almost unbearably arbitrary at times) the sense of satisfaction is exceptional. And the chances are that you will start again, with a freshly unlocked character and a newly increased difficulty level.

Part of the displeasure arises from the fact that, despite its appearance, *Viewtiful Joe* is not a return to the sort of old-skool, quick-fix gaming offered by the likes of *Gunstar Heroes*. Contrary to what you might think, the game is, in spite of its retro, arcade underpinnings, the absolute antithesis of the sort of short-burst gaming espoused by the likes of *Wario Ware*, and needs to be played in chunks of at least an hour.

Save points feel harshly spaced at first, and the decision not to position them before boss encounters at all is simply a wayward decision. If the GameCube is turned off before vanquishing an end of stage boss, it becomes necessary to play through the preceding level again. But since, if the GameCube is left switched on, it's possible to take as many efforts to defeat bosses without having to suffer this, it feels like a dictatorial imposition to anyone without a hefty amount of leisure time to spare.

Irritation also arises from puzzles that are initially bewildering, and a general difficulty level that requires precision and patience throughout. Part of this is no doubt due to the fact that gamers are very rarely punished for failure by forced repetition these days.





It's sometimes difficult to work out what to do or where to go next, but to its credit, the warped logic of the game is entirely consistent throughout, as is its demented and brilliant visual aesthetic

Previously in E118, E123, E125











Using Joe's Viewtiful powers drains his VFX meter; if it runs out completely, he turns back into ordinary Joe, which you don't want to happen in the middle of boss encounters

But it is also partly because the process of memorising waves of attacks or boss attack patterns can sometimes feel unnecessarily like painstaking and painful research, sapping the enjoyment that is otherwise to be derived from the game's various ingenuities.

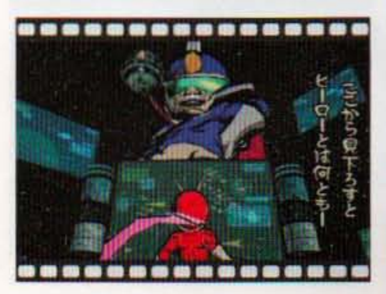
Part of this painful process of research will need to be devoted to working out the solutions to a whole host of brainteasers that punctuate Joe's progress – slowing down time to swell a water drip so that it hits a switch for example, or uppercutting a barrel before speeding under it. These early examples serve as a gentle introduction to the game's warped logic but, in spite of the essential consistency and internal coherence of the game's conundrums, later examples are still brain-achingly obtuse.

But that's it for the criticism. Apart from these problems, *Viewtiful Joe* is an awe-inspiring piece of videogame refreshment – that much is clear from the outset. The plot, for example, manages to be both lightweight and yet densely packed with intertextual reference; on the one hand it's endearing and amusing, and on the other, it will probably provide academics with a field day. Cut-scenes take the form of a brilliant and witty pastiche of Japanese monster movies, in which Joe must save the day and his girl.

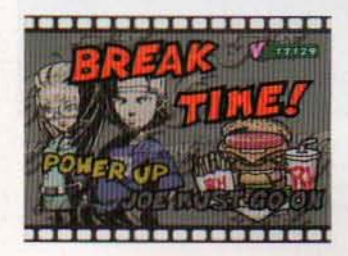
Marvellously though, Joe's monstrous enemies are attempting to escape the confines of celluloid because they fear for the transience of the cinematic form, and this filmic inspiration also manages to encompass lampoons of specific Hollywood examples, from 'Jaws' to 'Star Wars'. The game also manages to feature a host of videogame in-jokes, such as the inclusion of a character called Alastor, and it eventually builds up to a climax that sees Joe, in a monolithic power suit, take on his nemesis above the Earth's surface. And finally, there's a plot twist, which plays out like a heartfelt musing on the nature of artistic creation.

This finely filigreed narrative would hardly matter if the actual mechanics of play fell short, but they don't. In addition to the range





Edge's games room is no stranger to profanity, but it witnessed new levels of swearing between Joe receiving powers from his mentor, Captain Blue, and the game's dramatic conclusion



Take a break

Any complaints about an overly harsh difficulty level are partially offset by the opportunity to buy power-ups for Joe between levels. Thus, if forced to play a section repeatedly, he'll carry on earning credits that can be spent in the shop to buy extra health, extra lives, or enhancing Joe's powers. It's possible, for example, to buy an item that allows Joe to charge his VFX meter more rapidly than normal, or even just hamburgers to replenish his health between sections, with the result that eventual success becomes almost assured.



of attacks and leaps that might be expected of any self-respecting side-scrolling platform hero, Joe also gains a selection of satisfying powers over the course of the game – revealed gradually during the opening sections to regulate the rhythm, and to introduce players to the nuances of their use.

First comes the ability to slow down time, rapidly followed by the ability to speed it up. And then the capacity to zoom in on the action, which can be used in combination with the other two powers and basic attacks to perform a variety of manoeuvres, such as piledriving aerial attacks or windmilling spinning kicks. In addition to this basic roster of special moves, it's also possible to dodge attacks to unbalance opponents, and perform a variety of combos to rack up V points to enhance your ranking (which, instead of peaking at the more traditional 'S', runs all the way up to a rainbow 'V').

These actions are never less than a joy to perform, even in the face of any frustrations borne of unkind level design. And the positive upshot of callously designed levels is that they're full of gloriously memorable set-pieces. End of level bosses are an obvious example of this dichotomy, embodying both the game's unremitting cruelty in the shape of complicated attack patterns and seemingly inexhaustible reserves of stamina, but also sticking in the mind thanks to their aesthetic magnificence and structural intricacy. Stage five's boss, Leo, in particular is destined to become a common cultural frame of reference for a generation of gamers (and probably a byword for design severity).

"Stage five's boss, Leo is destined to become a common cultural frame of reference for gamers (and probably a byword for design severity)"

But it's not just the bosses that stand out. There is a host of equally unforgettable moments; negotiating the innards of an inverted airship, side-scrolling shoot 'em up sections, dispatching entire starships, taking out tanks, or even just the moments when Viewtiful Joe runs out of VFX and turns back into regular Joe, complete with grainy celluloid effect.

Sure, *Viewtiful Joe* will undoubtedly test your patience, and not always in a good way. But the moments that stay with you after you switch off the GameCube are characterised by inventiveness, wit, verve, charm, style, vigour and, above all, fun. And that's not something that can be said of that many other games these days.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Intelligent Systems** Price: **$30 (£19)** Release: **Out now (US), October (UK)**

Advance Wars is the best game available for the Game Boy Advance, the closest the format has to perfection. In terms of craft, in terms of entertainment, in terms of playing to the strengths of the platform, in terms of value for money, it is peerless. The only place where it falls down is accessibility, and not through design; through cliché, that some people will be put off by the idea of turn-based combat and the word 'Wars' in the title. Those people who push through that mental block more often than not find themselves enthralled.

"While Advance Wars 2 is still a superb game, it's only close to perfect for those who've never experienced perfection before"

But this wasn't some one-shot epiphany from Nintendo. *Advance Wars* was the product of a videogame lineage that goes back to 1990 and the Japan-only *Famicom Wars*, which was superseded in '97 by *Super Famicom Wars*. This is a game that has been honed over time, tweaked and twisted into Nintendo's own type of chess. Like chess, it has a limited set of pieces, relatively simple rules, and almost infinite possibilities. Like all the best Nintendo games, it is presented with warmth and humour.

So, given that *Advance Wars* is the best game for the Game Boy Advance, and has already been tweaked into something approaching genre flawlessness, what is there left for *Advance Wars 2* to do? Tweak a little more, perhaps; introduce a few diversions, new toys, but avoid touching anything that would introduce a major change to form or function. It is common sense to limit yourself to tinkering with the décor when the structure's so very, very solid.

And it's called Intelligent Systems, after all. *Advance Wars 2* isn't really *Advance Wars 2*, it's *Advance Wars 1.5*, with new maps, a handful of new physical features on the landscape and a new, less-complex Story mode. One of *Advance Wars'* most interesting aspects was that, just as you couldn't see all the levels on one run through the game, so the story wouldn't fully reveal itself until all (hidden) paths had been explored. The sequel is much more straightforward and verbose, giving away the majority of its secrets on the first run through. On the other hand, it's longer than the original, and contains a wider variety of missions. They tweak, they give, and they take away.

Of the changes to gameplay, the most significant is the introduction of new level furniture and goals. Maps can now be tattooed with giant pipes which provide an unwieldy and unrealistic means of fencing the player in; they cannot be passed over through land, sea or air. Destroying a weak point in these pipes may be the level's goal, or it may just be a way of creating a path through to another objective – capturing the enemy's base, for example. Immovable cannons with wide beams of fire appear in some levels, and eliminating them may be the objective, or it may simply be necessary as part of some wider manoeuvre. Missile silos are also new; these provide a one-shot attack on any point of the map, similar to Sturm's Meteor CO power from the original.





The characters have been redrawn; now Max, Sami, Andy et al are tougher and more angular. Does it affect the way the game plays? Well, no. Obviously





Advance Wars' control system is as elegant as ever. Pressing and holding B over a character shows their radius of attack, allowing crafty players to keep just out of range, or bait enemies with less powerful units







You can now move freely around the map. A neat touch, but the strategy implications are non-existent











The introduction of one new unit doesn't change the combat mechanic or balance at all. In fact, the Neotank – a stronger version of the Medium Tank, with a greater movement range, similar to the Heavy Tank from *Super Famicom Wars* – only really comes into play on the later levels, and integrating it into tactics learned from the original is hardly a giant leap of logic. Each island now has three COs, rather than *Advance Wars'* two, which means a handful of new characters. Their introduction is interesting rather than world shattering, as is the fact that each of the COs now has two levels of CO power, the special moves they can execute when they've been damaged. All neat tweaks. All good.

Advance Wars debilitating curse, though, is quite unavoidable given the game's nature. It's that those who are most passionate about it, those who wanted it most, those who've played the first one until they're seeing attack ranges when they shut their eyes; they will find most of this obscenely easy. The tactics at the core of Nintendo's chess haven't changed one bit, and perfect S-ranks fell on **Edge** constantly until the final few missions. Is that the game's fault? No.

The original was perfectly balanced, but to balance a tweaked sequel Intelligent Systems has had to find a difficulty curve which pleases both those who have never played before, and those who have played solidly for the last 12 months. That's impossible, and that's why, while *Advance Wars 2* is still a superb game, it's only close to perfect for those who've never experienced perfection before.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

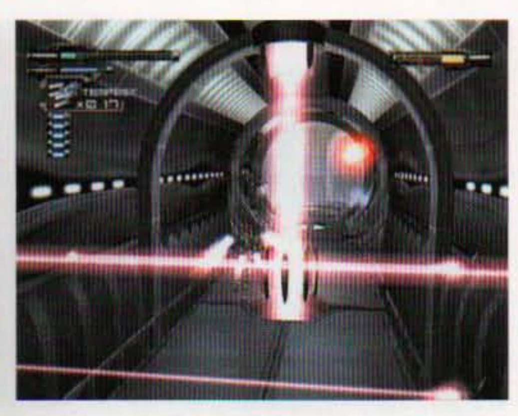


Animations still provide the graphical signature for battles. While every player will want to see their Neotanks in action at least once, they're not critical and it's likely you'll turn them off within an hour

Dino Crisis 3

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house (Production Studio 4)** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), October 31 (UK)** Previously in **E**120









Dino Crisis 3 is attractive in places, but don't be fooled – the largely inactive, 'untouchable' surroundings and work-experience level design create a sterile, tiresome atmosphere





The thrusters provide a welcome boosted jump and rapid movement on a par with the dinosaurs that you're fighting. However, the inept camera negates any serious attempt to exploit it

Dinosaurs are exciting. Spaceships are exciting. Therefore, are dinosaurs in spaceships twice as exciting? No. Dinosaurs in spaceships are stupid. Wait, there's another level to this – dinosaurs in stupid spaceships are a catastrophe. This nonsensical sequel in Capcom's mediocre survival horror spin-off fails in practically every sense, from fine detail to basic tenets.

Despite an attractive set-up taking in everything from '2001' (desolate ship in Jovian orbit) and 'Aliens' (whining Hicks character) to 'Event Horizon' (the Ozymandias reappears after 300 years lost), things unravel as soon as control is yours. The level design is blatantly contrived: rooms and corridors are cluttered with giant holes and enormous steps. Control panels lie in places unreachable by all but the player character. Don't believe the badly scripted story – the original occupants probably fell down a hole. Worse, the design doesn't work as a game.

This is partly due to the control, which marries the familiarly stilted *Resident Evil* run to a limited flight ability. Thrusters allow a boosted jump – clearly the reason for so many pointless steps – and a dodge function. This last ability would help considerably when fighting the sprightly enemies were it not for their greatest ally: the camera.

The survival horror staple of 'dramatic' view angles has long been contentious, but here it reaches new lows by almost never showing what the player needs, while at the same time failing to create dramatic tension. Regular POV changes also confuse, wreaking havoc on the context-sensitive directional controls. Recourse to the firstperson view is frequently required – sometimes just to find a door – though its use is limited as the player becomes rooted to the spot.

Consequently, fights can be disorientating affairs and the uniform locales do little to stop players backtracking unwittingly. Nor does the map, which bears little usable information. Opposition that respawns each time the player re-enters a room ensures maximum annoyance to the disorientated, and reappearing barriers – patronisingly, they glow red if they're breakable – are just a nonsense. The glow seems even more trite when few items beyond the inevitable switches and computer terminals are interactive, a sterility the absurdly clean and unmarked interiors only reinforce. Dinosaurs in stupid spaceships, then. A catastrophe.

Edge rating: Three out of ten

On reflection

Graphically *Dino Crisis 3* is expecting to impress, but it's a one-trick pony. The myriad metallic surfaces are intensely reflective, but large flat areas reveal an unsophisticated nature – reflections appear so large they interfere with the view. Contextually they confuse, too: why don't the dinosaurs leave marks? Why is everything so tidy? Has somebody spent 300 years polishing it?

Metal Slug 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SNK Playmore** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**

A waste of money to those who don't understand, a hypnotic vein-thrill for those who've ever been entranced by an SNK cabinet. Cash chinging in the slot, credits rolling up on the display, that gratifying noise when an extra life is awarded. Arguably *Metal Slug 3* is more pleasurable when you have something to lose, credits at stake. But let's face it, no one's going to complain about a long-awaited port to a home console.

So what's the big deal? A traditional 2D side-scrolling shoot 'em up it may be on the outside, but *Metal Slug 3* represents the peak of SNK's talents shortly before the company's demise. Even expressed in terms of mechanics, it is better than other genre favourites. Note the ability to commandeer vehicles, the alternate routes, the weapon sets and the bonus prisoner motif. All expertly honed over years of the series.

True, if you've played a *Metal Slug* title before then you know what to expect, but the simple pulp sci-fi plot pulls you along admirably. The Nazi-like Modern Army is corrupt, but when it becomes clear that an alien race is threatening Earth then joining forces with the axis of evil seems like the best option. From side-scrolling desert warfare to vertical-scrolling space combat *Metal Slug 3* is satisfyingly destructive. But what grabs you, what holds you and inspires countless replay is the game's character.

Soldiers scream if burned, then transform into comic-book piles of ashes; alien robots gently manoeuvre themselves forwards and backwards by pushing on joysticks; zombies puke red fluid in deadly arcs across the screen. The detail is exceptional, the imagination apparent in every animation a joy to witness. *Metal Slug 3* is worth playing countless times just to discover those almost imperceptible nuances underneath the frenzy.

As with all SNK (now under the auspices of Playmore) games, *Metal Slug 3* is uncompromisingly tough. While this PS2 port offers you infinite continues, the challenge comes from forcing your way through the game using as few lives as possible. A crucial end-of-game report lists exactly how many prisoners you saved and continues you used during the adventure.

Weak-willed gamers may not understand *Metal Slug 3*, diehard fans will continue going back for the noise, the character and the spectacle. Just try playing it without grinning from ear to ear.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten







Suicide bombers in Arabian attire? *Metal Slug 3* may not be culturally sensitive, but it's great fun







The journey to the lair of the mother brain is epic and the interim space battles are conducted vertically (left). Get cursed by a zombie and you turn undead, which gives you a very peculiar special attack (right)





A fat bonus

Complete Arcade mode and you are treated to two excellent bonus missions. On Fat Island (top) you must eat more food than your competitor. This is complicated by the fact that bonus weapons can freeze your opponent and each food type has a different weight poundage. In the UFO game (above) you take on the role of a foot-soldier from the Modern Army – either Normal, Bazooka or Shield. With just one life, defeating the alien onslaught is demanding but other CPU-controlled compatriots help fight the cause. As you'd expect, it is wonderfully addictive.

Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Game Freak** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**

The *Pokémon* series is Nintendo either at its laziest or at its most confident – 'change' seeming to be Game Freak's greatest taboo. Instead, each new generation inherits all the elements of its predecessor, and develops its own elaborations which in turn will be passed down. Appropriate, of course, for a game so much about eugenics.

So in *Ruby/Sapphire* not one scrap of the underlying game has been tweaked or jettisoned. Collecting, battling, evolving and exploring are as elegant and compulsive as they've always been. Some of the enormous new battery of Pokémon show the strain of creative exhaustion, but nothing has dulled the acquisitive hunger brought on by the appearance of a new or rare creature.

Some of the additions are fixes which satisfactorily gloss over the flaws of the older games. The dullness of trekking backwards and forwards is combated with the introduction of stunt and speed bikes, and replenishable berries and magic flutes minimise the expense and tedium of being stuck with a team of poisoned or paralysed Pokes.

But from these foundations rises a whole new palace of possibilities. The classic battle mechanic is now partnered by a Contest mode, a kind of Pokémon Crufts. Every offensive move now also has a Contest rating, and the beauty battles are as complex as the real-world scraps. To up your chances, berries can be collected and blended into stat-boosting Pokéblocks, by means of a dizzying minigame which can also be played via link-up. Link-up mode also enables the new two-on-two battles. Although well thought out, these only present a real tactical shift for those prepared to scheme very, very hard indeed.

And there lies the rub. *Ruby/Sapphire* is probably the most intricate and detailed console RPG available. Contest mode, which seems initially like a cute little bonus, is in fact a chasm of complexity. Staring into it will make many players woozy. But *Pokémon* is built on a lie. You haven't 'gotta catch 'em all'. Very few people do, relying instead on a SWAT team of their favourite six. You can freely ignore the talent contest and the berry-blending, the secret bases, breeding programs, bike races and safaris. But to do so would be to miss out on the absorbing and imaginative evolution of an enduring classic.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten







Secret bases (top) can be decorated with items won or purchased. Many are interactive, such as fully working slides and mats that sparkle or play tunes when stepped on



Mixing berries produces coloured Pokéblocks – red for coolness, blue for beauty (left). These bear an uncanny resemblance to Pez, putting the merchandising cart a little before the horse



Fifteen minutes

Roving television reporters hassle you for interviews after battles and contests. You compose your answers to their questions word by word by means of an extensive and baffling dictionary. It's worth putting a little consideration into any quotes you give, however, as interviews are swapped each time you link with another Game Boy. Then, as you travel from town to town, you will pick up reports of your Pokéfriend's exploits, and even receive tips on their favourite moves and Pokémon combinations

Ka 2: Let's Go to Hawaii

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **Zoom** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**124









Ka 2's blood-sucking protagonist can now feast on any part of his hosts' bodies. Some direction is provided, but a strong grasp of Japanese will be required to understand it

Sweet love," whispers the American woman over some excellent lounge music, as the *Ka 2* intro music starts to roll. "Let's suck together." Well, quite. *Ka* was that fantasy love affair that sounded fantastic in your head. When it actually happened it was slightly limp and disappointing. The many thrills of being a mosquito – exploration, voyeurism, stealth, humour, arcade biting, a new gaming experience, whatever – all faded fast, next to the limited biting possibilities, and by-the-numbers token collection.

The sequel takes the Yameda family to Hawaii, to stay with a confused American triplicate, the Browns. The Browns also have something of a history with mosquitos, which they've attempted to solve by fumigating their home. Unfortunately for them and their houseguests, their attempt at annihilation has not been total, which gives the player the chance to taunt both families some more.

And that opportunity to annoy has been vastly improved. The hero mosquito can now bite opponents anywhere on their body. In order to progress, special spots must be targeted – for example, to relieve Mr Yameda's toothache, a delicate bite might be placed on his mouth and some token amount of blood extracted. Collectable tokens appear more useful, most significantly the resurrection coin which gives karmic resuscitation to a downed mosquito. Points bonuses are on offer for particularly daring bites, held on until the moment right before the snap.

The trade-off for the variety is a matching leap in complexity. Control is still fine; while your mosquito feels clumsy at first, it can be trained up with the help of some of the collectable tokens. But since the game now directs you to key parts on your target's body, those without strong Japanese language knowledge will suffer without instruction, and find progression a case of trial and error.

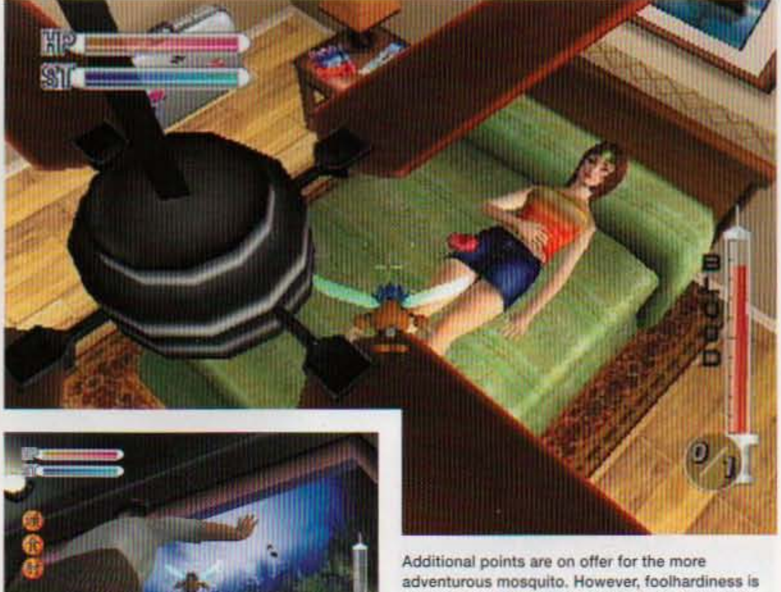
Still, it's something beyond the game mechanic that really appeals here. *Ka 2* is a playful thing, evident in its premise but also in its execution, technically scrappy but lovingly constructed. The treatment is reasonably adult in tone (see Race relations) and that gives some guide as to how the player must regard the game. Those approaching it like children – to race through the experience in order to break it – will find it only peripheral entertainment, but submerging yourself in the whole concept is something of a buzz.

Edge rating: Seven out of te



Race relations

Just as those who don't speak Japanese will have difficulty understanding *Ka 2*, The Yamedas and the Browns have some difficulty relating to each other. Thankfully, westerners will be able to understand all of the Browns FMV intro sequences, which are subtitled in Japanese, and provide a wry – and revealing – look at how the Japanese caricature Americans for comedy purposes. Which, for the record, appears to be as a patronising, arrogant fools. Interesting.



Additional points are on offer for the more adventurous mosquito. However, foolhardiness is likely to be punished by a crushing swat and will require the use of a resurrection coin

The Great Escape

Suikoden III

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **See text** Release: **Out now (US)**

Edge has wanted to review *Suikoden III* for some time but it is only now, with confirmation that Konami definitely won't be bringing the game to Europe, that we've decided to pay the exorbitant eBay prices for a US copy of the game. The *Suikoden* series has one of the most loyal fanbases of any RPG dynasty but the relatively small number of followers has ensured only a limited US print run of this latest iteration, resulting in its swift collectability.

The series has always emphasised plot over aesthetics, with the first two games on PSone featuring functional visuals but compelling gameplay. This third game sets the story 15 years after the second and so loses some of the key protagonists, whom series-lovers will miss. The main innovation here is the trinity sight system, an idea less gimmicky than its name suggests. At the start of the game the player chooses to view the action from one of three main characters, all of which work for different factions in the Grassland war.

The game is split into chapters and at the close of each you have the option to continue the next with your current protagonist, or to go back and play through as one of the other two. This leads to some 'Rashômon'-esque sequences where you view the same events through thoroughly different eyes and it's an interesting feature even if it is underplayed.

The battle system is easily the weakest portion of the game, despite the hardcore micromanagement options for your characters. You choose a team of six out of a possible 108 characters (see Stars in your eyes), divided into three teams of two. Fights take the traditional turn-based format but orders are issued to each pair rather than individuals at the start of a round.

There is a massive loss of control here, not least because the characters move around the 3D fight scene as they please. Frequently they wander into each other's spell blast radius causing frustration. Combat gameplay is a real step backwards for the series and feels like a failed attempt at innovation for innovation's sake.

Although *Suikoden III* is better than the average Japanese RPG, it's clear that with the move to 3D Konami has tried to freshen the formula. But by watering down the series' bastion gameplay elements it may have alienated all but the fanatics.

Edge rating: Six out of ten













Konami has succeeded in creating a rich gameworld replete with its own history, deep politics and cultural expression. However, its attempt to improve the combat gameplay may disappoint the series' diehard fans



Should you successfully manage to collect all of *Suikoden III*'s 108 characters, you will be rewarded with two additional points of view



Stars in your eyes

One of the most endearing features of the series has been the inclusion of the stars, 108 playable characters scattered throughout the game that the player can find, recruit and then use in their party. They originate from a Chinese myth that gives *Suikoden* its name, concerning 36 heavenly heroes and 72 earthly heroes regarded as outlaws by their governments but heroes by the people. Once recruited these characters stay in your own castle hub where they can be visited and joined in minigames.

The Great Escape

Format: **Xbox (version tested), PS2, PC** Publisher: **SCi** Developer: **Pivotal Games** Price: **£40** Release: **August 29**

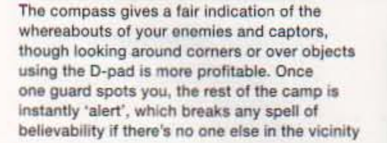








The compass gives a fair indication of the whereabouts of your enemies and captors, though looking around corners or over objects using the D-pad is more profitable. Once one guard spots you, the rest of the camp is instantly 'alert', which breaks any spell of believability if there's no one else in the vicinity











The most obvious use of the licence can be seen, or rather heard, during the Virgil Hilts episodes. The voice of Steve McQueen has been taken from the 1963 film and tragically shoehorned into cut-scenes

Everyone has a favourite moment. Danny's sudden onset of claustrophobia, Hilts' majestic motorbike leap, Ashley-Pitt's dirt-down-the-trouser-leg ruse, and **Edge**'s choice: myopic Colin's attempt to pick up a pin without collapsing into a heap on the floor. Rich material for a videogame; but you won't find much to inspire your POW fantasies here.

There was a time when gamers were encouraged to think for themselves. Indeed, the original *The Great Escape* (1986) put the player in a POW camp and asked you to observe the rules and daily routines of prison life. It was up to you to covertly explore the camp, find the means of escape and hatch a cunning escape plan (several avenues were possible). Unfortunately, Pivotal has pitched its game to the lowest common denominator, which these days seems to be Britain's most successful village idiot.

Get the wire cutters from hut 112 ("new objective added"); speak to Ashley-Pitt ("new objective added"); find the wrench to switch off the generator ("new objective added"). You get the idea. This nannying gets irksome pretty quickly, and gives the game a disjointed, constrained feel.

In its favour, *The Great Escape* is surprisingly varied. The player slips into the shoes of four characters: Hendley, a genius at lock-picking; Sedgwick, a resourceful gadget man; MacDonald, the German-speaking undercover operative and Virgil Hilts, the tenacious American. There's lots of spotlight dodging, of course, but *The Great Escape* offers more diversity than Codemaster's *PoW*. From infiltrating enemy truck depots to jumping train carriages, it's difficult not to feel a slight frisson of excitement when a mission is completed and the music starts up.

The game works adequately when stealth is called on but breaks down during the, admittedly few, moments when you need to shoot to kill. Targeting is fiddly and enemies mill around then attack unconvincingly. In fact the AI state of enemies is either on or off – dumb or panic stricken. A clumsy mêlée attack is possible (presumably to prevent the alarm being raised), but once a guard has noticed you, the rest of the camp is alerted whatever you do.

The Great Escape is saved by a few good set-pieces and the licence, but it's hard not to feel hard done by. Those willing to endure yet another stealth game could find their morale ebbing away by the end of this.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

MegaMan Network Transmission

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **In-house/Arika** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**121

MegaMan Network Transmission is something of a departure, sure, but it's nothing new. It is a hybrid of the original Famicom games, pure-bred platform shooters, and the newer EXE franchise, strategy titles that take a turn-based approach to combat. Here the action is free flowing, but MegaMan has to select a series of 'chips' at the start of each level, each of which represents a different mode of fire for his cannon. The default weapon is almost useless, so careful selection is vital. And, since these special attacks are effectively finite, economic use of them is important, too.

That can prove a problem when things get hectic, since *MegaMan*'s appeal comes from racing through levels, eliminating enemies with instinctive fire and consummate, kinetic professionalism. Here it's pensive and often frustrating, exacerbated by little things, such as (the traditional, but dated) lack of a static duck move. And *MegaMan*'s structure is as rigid as his body, leading you through slow, linear mazes, collecting new powerups and fighting cruel, brutal bosses. It's not an inspiring quest, falling awkwardly between action and strategy, and it's unlikely to satisfy anyone other than rabidly obsessive fans of the character.

Edge rating: Four out of ten









The cel-shaded visuals look stark and uninteresting when freeze-framed, but in motion they're sometimes sumptuous and always appropriate. And even if you can't admire them, they're certainly not *MegaMan*'s main problem; that lies in the breaking of one game with a dynamic drawn from another

Jet Grind Radio

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **THQ** Developer: **Vicarious Visions** Price: **$20 (£13)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**





Controls are sensitive but frustrating. Skaters ping off invisible walls, and attempts to turn a neat 180° often produce enough forward momentum to carry them over the edge of a rooftop





Faithful as a bloodhound to the Dreamcast original, this GBA port is a stunning example of when authenticity ought to be sacrificed to utility. As an achievement it is remarkable. Every aspect of the original game is reproduced, down to the Graffiti Soul locations and the dance moves of the skaters.

The problem is that the intricate nature of the *Jet Set Radio* levels is unsuited to isometric presentation. Although characters appears shaded out when behind another object, the process is unpredictable. Too often you are left staring at overlapping planes of grey, unable to establish which is vertical and which is horizontal, all while the clock ticks down and Captain Onishima goose-trots ever closer. The circular painting motions for producing tags have been preserved, senselessly divorced from the fluidity of an analogue stick. Even the structural flaw of the original – the possibility of being stuck with just one mission open – remains.

This is not a lazy port. The graffiti design system has found a better home than the humble Dreamcast VMU, and Sleep mode is a thoughtful inclusion. But the loyalty of the conversion is ill-advised.

Edge rating: Four out of ten

Virtual-On Marz

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Hitmaker** Price: **¥6,800 (£35)** Release: **Out Now (Japan), November (UK)**



The balance between ranged attacks and close combat manoeuvring is delicate, requiring players to choose between the relative safety distance offers, and the destructive potential of in-fighting







The PS2 ought to be the first current home system to offer an accurate translation of this revered arcade fighter. Fully controllable through the twin analogue sticks and shoulder buttons alone, mastering the distinctive square dance of *Virtual-On* combat is one of gaming's great challenges. The DualShock sticks, however, are not up to the job: woolly and slippery, it's all too easy to miss a crucial sidestep. Other control configurations are perfectly viable, however, and defeats are as often caused by a leaden brain as by fudgey fingers.

The design of the mechs is exuberant and stylish but the rest of the game is a severe visual disappointment. Arenas are sparse and bland, and loading times on the select screens further conspire to dampen your enthusiasm.

A mission structure attempts to force some variety onto the classic mechanic, but it fails to mask its repetitive nature. Nor should it: you come to *Virtual-On* to beat up big robots through a mix of opportune tactics and instinctive brawn, and throughout *Marz* the precise and articulated combat remains as demanding as ever.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **SCEI** Price: **$50 (£31)** Release: **Out now (US), TBC (UK)**

Edge is glad it doesn't live in Japan. Finding new angles to critique generic eastern RPGs is hard enough with the small percentage of games that make a western translation let alone the flood of titles that dominate Japanese monthly charts. If this appears negative, it's simply because the game does little to distinguish and elevate itself over the plethora of PS2 RPGs that have hit western shores recently.

Edge usually avoids lazy comparisons but it seems appropriate here: the battle system is a simplified version of that in Capcom's latest *Breath of Fire*; the dialogue, a mixture of spoken and written word, sub-*Xenosaga* but super-*Suikoden III* and the soundtrack is a confusing pastiche of RPG clichés from sweeping orchestral manoeuvres to porn wailing guitars.

The plot is much more refreshing focusing on the fate of twin brothers, separated at birth and each raised by a different warring race. The device allows for the exploration of unusual themes (for an RPG) of racism and loyalty. There's nothing to stop a dedicated RPG fan from having a thoroughly good time but the *Arc the Lad* games have always had a derivative heritage and this is competent but sadly no different.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









Arc the Lad **has benefited from a swift localisation: it was only released in Japan three months ago. However, the mixture of written dialogue and asinine speech soon grates and feels incoherent**

Kirby Air Ride

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **HAL Laboratory** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), Q1 2004 (UK)** Previously in **E122**, **E125**

Kirby Air Ride is broadly divided into three parts: a thirdperson track racing game; an overhead party racing game; and a city challenge mode in which collected power-ups unlock various minigames. Acceleration is automatic, and just one button is used to brake, to hoover up obstacles (and, in typical Kirby fashion, to acquire their powers), to activate special powers, and to charge up bursts of speed. Unfortunately, none of this is very entertaining at all.

It's not that the game lacks complexity; the apparent simplicity of the control mechanism does mask certain nuances of handling, and there's plenty to unlock. No, what it lacks is finesse and subtlety, or any spark of entertainment; more often than not, success is a consequence of luck rather than judgement.

In the main racing game, for example, it's far too easy to simply buffet off (invisible) walls and bump round corners and yet still beat CPU opponents, while the sub-*Fusion Frenzy* party game consists of various tracks designed to maximise the randomness. The result is that the game offers some of the most slender, inconsequential, and ultimately boring distractions to be found on the GameCube.

Edge rating: Three out of ten









Though there's plenty to unlock in *Air Ride*, there's very little actual entertainment on offer, in spite of the inclusion of a manic party game and various multiplayer modes. Indeed the Edge games room has probably never seen such a sullen or bored atmosphere during multiplayer sessions

Initial D Special Stage

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sega Rosso** Price: **¥6,800 (£36)** Release: **Out now (Japan), TBC (UK)**



The usual modes are offered, with Story following Takumi's automotive exploits and featuring other characters from the series. The familiar range of Japanese machinery is available with limited tune-up options opening up as you progress through the game. Sadly, there's no twoplayer option







Licensed on the popular manga and anime series, *Initial D* tells the tale of high school driving phenomenon Takumi Fujiwara and his (and his entourage's) tarmac adventures. It's a well presented affair, with text-heavy sections denoting the plot, an effort sadly lost on non-Japanese speakers.

On the road there isn't a tremendous deal of subtlety to be found. The handling model is accessible, grounded in established arcade heritage, but by current standards feels disappointingly basic. Too often it's possible to negotiate the (excellently designed) twisty mountain roads without ever having to recur to the brake button. Sure, drifting is a fundamental part of the game but it nevertheless feels overdone.

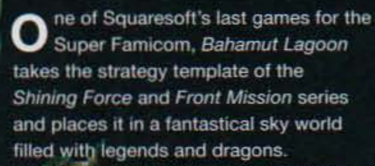
Ultimately it comes down to this simple fact: *Initial D* is simply not distinguished enough on its own merits to convincingly stand out from the swarming racing scene. Granted, it holds a certain charm and there's definite enjoyment to be had but then that easily applies to most racing games these days. The main appeal here is clearly the licence meaning that only those familiar with the series will get the most out of the game.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Bahamut Lagoon

Edge takes a fresh look at a seminal game classic from yesteryear

Format: **Super Famicom** Publisher: **Squaresoft** Developer: **In-house** Release: **1996**



One of Squaresoft's last games for the Super Famicom, *Bahamut Lagoon* takes the strategy template of the *Shining Force* and *Front Mission* series and places it in a fantastical sky world filled with legends and dragons.

Bahamut amalgamates Squaresoft's most successful innovations as we see the silent protagonist (a la *Chrono Trigger*) supported by a huge cast of controllable allies (a la *FFVI*). The plot looks like a straightforward rescue-the-princess affair but thankfully Squaresoft steers away from cliché, fleshing out its characters with witty precision and clever scenarios. The developer looks to have mastered the art of 2D graphical characterisation and, as the game boasts some of the best graphics the system has seen, has achieved some wondrous moments of expression with the sprites.

The team-based approach to the storyline complements the strategic gameplay wonderfully. Battles are fought in areas divided into grids on which you command six teams each made up of four characters of your own choosing. Each team also has a dragon that can be ordered to attack or defend.

Tactically the game is deeper than any strategy RPG yet seen and players must carefully pick terrain conditions and near or far combat choices. After each team takes a turn their dragon behaves as he sees fit within the offence/defence guidelines set for it. The set-piece battles are a refreshing antidote to the random skirmishes that have become genre standard before now. The player is not only responsible for team composition but also for the development of their dragons, which can be fed every item in the game, from characters' armour to porn mags. Every item bolsters particular stats from strength to IQ, adding a tension to one's item management as the player decides whether to increase a dragon's HP with a high potion or save it for possible use in the ensuing battle.

This is the future of RPGs; almost full player control over team make-up and high levels of micromanagement. The fact that the game is complemented with a rip-roaring story makes it one of the most compelling adventure titles since *Final Fantasy VI*.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten





Dragons transform as they reach certain levels. The degree of satisfaction when a dragon you have carefully bred and nurtured wipes out an enemy squadron in one move is palpable



Dragon quest

Yes **Edge** played through *Bahamut* upon release, kanji dictionary in tow, and the game was stunning even with a partially obscured plot. The gameplay paved the way for *Final Fantasy Tactics* (see E57), *Ogre Battle*, *Monster Rancher* and even *Advance Wars*. It is the recent fan translation that has really brought the title to the attention of RPG devotees everywhere and the game has lost none of its charm in the intervening seven years.







The battle animations are simply stunning with huge screen-filling sprites. The relationship between your team and their dragon is a complicated and strategic one





The making of…

Sega Rally Championship 1995

After losing considerable ground to coin-op racing rival Namco in the first half of the '90s, Sega returned with a title that would prove as consequential as 1986's OutRun, capturing the hearts of arcaders and guaranteeing the acceptance of a new videogaming sub-genre



Sega Rally is to Saturn what Namco's *Ridge Racer* is to PlayStation. With both games representing the apex of arcade-to-home racing conversions in their time, they demonstrate excellence in the trade both companies know best: the arcade fix. Perhaps an even more telling link between the titles is the fact that Kenji Sasaki, director of *Sega Rally*, was originally one of the key members of the original *Ridge Racer* team (and Namco itself).

Original format: **Arcade**
Publisher: **Sega**
Developer: **In-house (AM3)**
Origin: **Japan**
Original release date: **1995**

Sasaki-san, CEO of Sega Rosso, looks back on *Sega Rally* with fondness. "We were determined to develop an arcade racing game with a difference. But with *Ridge Racer* and *Daytona USA* on the market we had to find another take on the genre. We were after something in vogue in terms of motorsport racing and as we were keen on great engine sounds, cool cars and great sensations – the obvious choice was rally."



There had been rally game before, of course, but *Sega Rally Championship*'s success encouraged the industry's acceptance of other forms of motorsport other than, say, F1 as perfect videogame content

In the arcade-racer family tree, *Sega Rally* sits right at the top of the 3D rally lineage. Until *Sega Rally* debuted, aside from 2D arcade titles such as Midway's 1980 *Rally-X*, the rallying genre was largely left untouched. However, the release of *Sega Rally* was significant due to the intuitive stylised handling, beautiful visuals and the multiplayer capabilities of the machine.

"At the time there were two taboos in Japan with regard to rally games," continues Sasaki-san. "The first one was the box-shaped car. Nobody wanted to make games based on the everyday car. All racing games were based around stylish F1 or GT vehicles. The second was rally itself. Again, people were uneasy to the idea of a game based on this sport."

Featuring a slim selection of three licensed rally cars, the Toyota Celica, Lancia Delta Integrale, and the hidden Lancia Stratos, the console game went on to introduce some basic tuning options (you could change your tyres, set your front and rear suspension, your handling response, and your blow-off valve), additions still relatively rare before *Gran Turismo*. The game's designer, **Tetsuya Mizuguchi**, continues the story. "We had no experience in driving those cars. We asked Toyota and [Lancia owner] Fiat for help with testing but they turned us away several times. We kept trying and after they saw what we had they came onboard."

They say that the closer you get to innovation the harder it is to ascertain the quality of your creation. This was certainly the case for Sasaki-san and his team as they drove the virgin snow. "To be completely honest I was very worried that the game was going to be a failure at the arcades. It was only as the game started to take shape from the team's personal touches that I started to feel any confidence in its potential. At one key point while we were developing I had been working so hard, always with cars on my mind, that I got to the point where I just couldn't see the attraction anymore. I'd think, 'What the hell is so exciting about cars? What is so fun about driving?' So I drove up into the mountains with my own car. It was such an enjoyable and exhilarating experience that I decided to incorporate this into the game. This was how the third mountain track in the game was conceived and decided on."

When it came to creating the visual look of the game the team was given great freedom to get inspired and enthusiastic about the project. Mizuguchi-san even recalls an unusual road trip, "I remember we spent three weeks driving from the American west coast to Mexico, filming and grabbing all the textures we could. It was my first job in developing a game from scratch. I learned a lot."

The struggles developers encountered with Saturn's 3D capabilities are well documented. Indeed, the finished Saturn conversion could only managed a rate of 30fps to the arcade's 60fps.

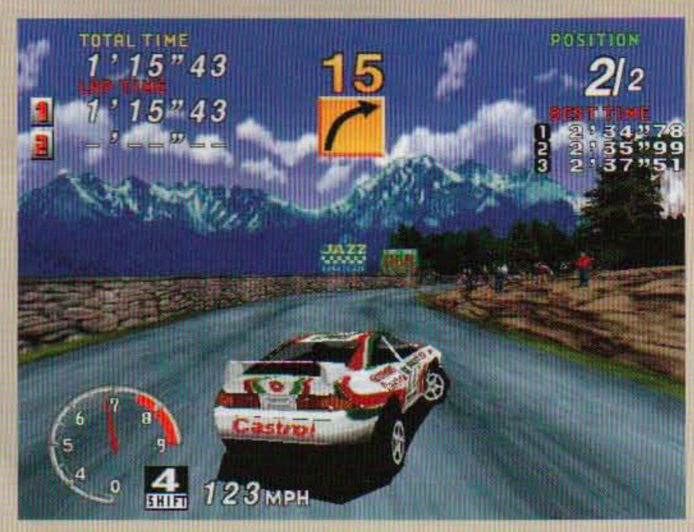












Back in 1995 Sega's Model 2 board was at the top of the graphical game. *Sega Rally* first seduced players on a visual level and then kept them coming back with exemplary gameplay

The process of fitting such demanding code into the Saturn required detailed planning before the conversion began in earnest. "There were two main problems with the Saturn conversion. First it was impossible to completely recreate the arcade graphics to the console. Although this was possible to achieve for some 2D titles it was simply stretching the technology too far at the time. As we had comparatively so few polygons to play with the real challenge was to give the same impressions on a tight polygonal budget.

"Second, we had to address the controller issue. *Sega Rally* was designed for play on a steering wheel and I was not sure we could recreate the sensation of drifting (among other things) on the first track using the Saturn's controller. But beside the obvious technical challenges that had been set the most important challenge to me was that the Saturn version kept the arcade spirit and made itself available to as wide an audience as possible."

The home conversion of *Sega Rally* was to become a key title for the Saturn, albeit too late. It shipped in Japan on December 29, 1995 with the (arcade's) title *Sega Rally Championship 1995*. One has to wonder if the decision to keep the full title two days before the New Year was a mistake. SoA and SoE certainly thought so and dropped the tag for the western release. However, this did nothing to hamper sales in Japan where it sold well.





The Saturn conversion does an admirable job of capturing the sublime handling and dynamism of the arcade game despite controller issues

For Sasaki-san *Sega Rally* was a definitive triumph and one that moved his career in the videogame industry considerably, "I still, even today hear from the fans, even after all these years. There are two games in my life I can't disconnect from even if I want to. I'm speaking about *Ridge Racer* and *Sega Rally*. In *Sega Rally Championship*, I put all the things I was not able to do on *Ridge Racer*. In Japan I am most famous for these two titles."

"I got to the point where I just couldn't see the attraction anymore. I'd think, 'What the hell is so exciting about cars? What is so fun about driving?'"

Mizuguchi-san remembers his favourite part of the game for a very different reason, "The engine sound of the Lancia Delta was in fact the sound of my car at that time!"

Sega Rally is a critical title, the first salient example of the 3D rally genre. Its significance is perhaps understated amongst western console owners, due to the Saturn's limited success. But its enduring place in the world's arcades is thoroughly deserved.



RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 63, October 1998

Oh, what a terribly shiny cover. Embossed. Varnished. Silver fifth colour. And let's not forget the *Turok 2* bookmark which neatly opened the magazine at p84, the *Turok 2* review.

"Placing *Turok 2* on p1 of this issue will probably be a source of consternation to some," ran the editorial. Well, yes, it certainly has been. *Turok 2* hasn't aged particularly well…

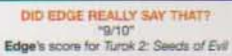
Further anxiety was caused by the conservative appraisal of Treasure's magnificent *Radiant Silvergun*. Within months of the **E**63, **Edge** was in therapy, suffering from the trauma of a seemingly uncharacteristic (and thankfully momentary) lapse in judgement.

Enough. The weighty **E**63 saw a little content shimmy, as Out There leaped to the backend of the magazine. Lost in the move was Numedia, replaced by the far friendlier Consumer Tech section. Codeshop, née Develop, made its rearend debut, and an extra-thick slice of Arcade View fell at the backend of this issue, too. It's sad to think that, if **Edge** ran the section today it'd be full of photo sticker units.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"9/10"
Edge's score for *Turok 2: Seeds of Evil*

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"2010? I will be here making great games."
Trip Hawkins considers his future. 3DO Studios, 1997–2003, RIP

TESTSCREENS AND RATINGS:
F-1 World Grand Prix (N64, 8/10); *Buck Bumble* (N64, 5/10); *Ninja: Shadow of Darkness* (PS, 6/10); *Wild 9* (PS, 6/10); *Legion of Heroes* (PS, 8/10); *Brave Fencer Musashiden* (PS, 8/10); *Dracula X* (Saturn, 7/10); *Radiant Silvergun* (Saturn, 8/10)





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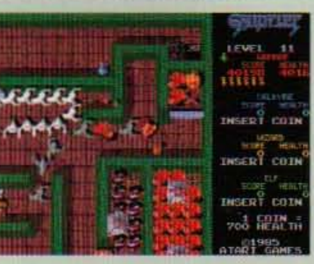
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1. *Turok 2: Seeds of Doubt*
2. **Edge** investigates 'Digital Duplicity', with the help of a silver fifth and an excellent in-house illustration
3. "Sega's special-edition *Godzilla* Dreamcast PDA", looking uncannily like a VMU
4. Republic's design pixie Demis Hassabis
5. *Radiant Silvergun*, back in eBay's infancy
6. An early shot of the much-delayed *Winback*

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Owain Bennallack, editor of 'Develop', remembers running the Gauntlet…





Owain Bennallack, a hero to 'hundreds' in the toughest arcade in Swansea during the '80s

I pity today's gamers. We had it all first. We had multiplayer gaming with sweat, blood, and tears. We had characters you'd upgrade with skill or cash. We had *Gauntlet* in the toughest arcade in Swansea.

The death of the arcade is rarely lamented. Perhaps we're just relieved we don't need an umbrella to get a gaming fix. I know patrons of the toughest arcade in Swansea who are happy to have escaped with their lives (drug addiction or criminal records notwithstanding). But there was a time, 1985, playing Atari's *Gauntlet*, when the arcade was gaming's ground zero. A level playing field greeting all-comers.

Welcome, Valkyrie. Or Warrior, Wizard or Elf. Nerdy kids, we each had our favourite, and at lunchtimes we'd discuss SAS-style room clearance with minimal loss of lifeforce. Valkyrie would dispatch the generators. Elf would cover. Wizard wouldn't waste a potion. Warrior – thump things.

On Saturday we'd convert our paper rounds into 50 ten-pence pieces – and we'd go for it. By midday we'd be surrounded by a dozen people – it felt like hundreds – and we'd be battling on level 53. But our lifeforce was running out. One by one, we'd sell out our characters to the boys with cash. Which ironically was just what the games industry did.



Communicate by post:
Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW
Or email:
edge@futurenet.co.uk

I am writing in a state of apoplexy brought about by a number of respectable publications, such as your own, blithely dismissing games which have not 'embraced' the future – ie are not rendered in three dimensions.

I quote from the July 2003 issue of **Edge** in which *Rise of Nations* was reviewed: "Although handsome, the game's tile-based isometric viewpoints appear backward at a time when even the *Command & Conquer* series has embraced full 3D."

At what point did 3D become synonymous with superiority? When a game is not served by the added complexity and complication of 3D, what mileage is gained from including it? I know it's fashionable these days to make every game 3D (witness the barrage of inferior 3D updates to classic 2D titles), but what is fashionable is a notoriously poor indicator of what is desirable (again, witness the saturation of bullet-time).

Why is a fixed, in this case isometric, viewpoint backward? Two of the most beautiful and well executed games I've played in the last few years – *Commandos* and *Desperados* were remarkably free from 3D, and much better for it, without the seemingly inevitable 3D baggage of crappy camera angles, confused and frantic clicking and searching for enemies, and a blocky, soulless appearance.

There are times when going against the grain is required. Give me a beautifully rendered static object over a multi-directional-polygonal-vectored-whatever any day. *Rise of Nations* is a strategy game (albeit an RTS, which is another area I have a beef with) not a firstperson shooter. You shouldn't need a ninja computer to run it, and you don't, but it still looks damn good in my opinion.

Don't get me wrong, certain genres have advanced considerably, or even been invented, with the introduction of 3D – the shooter, the stealth 'em up, for example. But who honestly believes the new *Prince of Persia* will be a patch on the original?

I sadly await *Civilization 4* – coming soon with 3D accelerated graphics, squad-based gameplay, and whizz bang particle effects which will no doubt wow the slack-jawed soulless minions of orthodoxy with their super-fast computers and copies of *Max Payne*, but hammer another nail into the coffin of those who prefer quality over glossiness.
Colin

Edge is in no way an advocate for 3D gaming for 3D's sake. Titles such as *Viewtiful Joe*, and yes, *Commandos* are ample demonstration that a move to three dimensions isn't always desirable. In the particular instance of *Rise of Nations*, however, it's true to say that the use of isometric visuals do appear backward when the transition to 3D has been embraced by other, similar titles with a dramatic, and positive impact on the tactical scope of the genre.

In E125 RedEye managed to hit the nail on the head in his own, unique style. Where he erred, however, was assuming that we should merely encourage traditional artistic types to join the industry – film-makers, painters and similar types. However, these mediums, as brilliant as they are, are incredibly non-interactive and usually the observer sees them exactly as the director or painter intended them to be seen. Games on the other hand, are completely different. The player often sees things that the designers never even realised were possible – a fact that is especially true of those games that feature emergent or open-ended gameplay.

With many games it is obvious that user input determines a large part of the playing experience. Indeed a game designer has more in common with a car designer than a film director in the respect that both cars and games are ultimately controlled by the user and from time to time both cars and games can crash.

I take issue with the idea that somehow artists of more respected media can come up with better ideas than anyone else for a medium that is so radically different from their own. For example, I was recently blown away when someone suggested that, "Sony should make a game where you use the EyeToy to steer an F1 car using hand movements." I was even more surprised by the fact that this brilliant suggestion came not from an artist, but from my mother.

We don't need to welcome more artists into the industry; instead we should simply be welcoming more people into the industry, regardless of what they do in life. You never know, they might just come up with something that changes the way we think about gaming forever. Perhaps the videogame industry should change its insular manner and listen to the odd passing comment or email. Or at least listen to the odd middle-aged person from time to time to see what games they want. One day even I will be over the hill and most likely not up to the challenges of *Wario Ware Inc*.
Crispin Walker-Buckton

RedEye's diatribes usually make me smile but last month's really made me think. His suggestion of inviting random creative types to consider using videogames as their medium of expression is sound – the problem with the Wachowski brothers' effort was not their creative ability (or lack of it) but perhaps because they were all too familiar with videogame mores, resulting in *Enter the Matrix* being generic to the point of self parody.

The thought of people like Pedro Almodóvar or the Coen brothers producing games is genuinely exciting, though maybe we shouldn't invite Peter Greenaway. I fear there may be framerate issues.
Paul Drury

Inviting opinion from outside the narrowly targeted videogame audience of young white males is obviously desirable, though it's difficult to see how the process could be structured so that it doesn't turn into some sort of half-baked focus group testing. It's also difficult to see the industry's forces of conservatism entertaining the notion very seriously. As for the Wachowskis, it also appears that they were unfamiliar with both the day-to-day

"At what point did 3D become synonymous with superiority? When a game is not served by the added complexity and complication of 3D, what mileage is gained from including it?

workings of the development process and the technical limits of current gaming hardware.

I can't say I speak for everyone in my part of the world but I just feel confused. Up to this point of my life, videogames were just a fun way to spend my time. Since **Edge** has shown me the bigger part of the gaming world, I just wonder where I fit in. Living in south east Asia, people might assume that I can get the latest releases from the three powerhouses of the videogame world. Far from it.

Prices for games and consoles are high, piracy continues to dominate and the acceptance of videogame culture just cannot break through. I still live with my parents and the guilty feeling of taking their hard-earned cash to purchase a $50 game just is too much. Even sharing my obsession with other people is a hard thing to do. It is just too mainstream or whatever you want to call it, over here. It is sad to see that the only thing driving the real 'gamers' in my country is pirated software. But to my surprise, *Rez*, *Frequency*, *Vib Ribbon* and many similar titles are not even available in bootleg form.

Judging by the pages of Inbox every month, so many people in the UK share the dream of pure and fun videogames. Even issues surrounding the videogame world are discussed in this section, from female gamers to violence and even **Edge** being a film critic.
Brian Tan

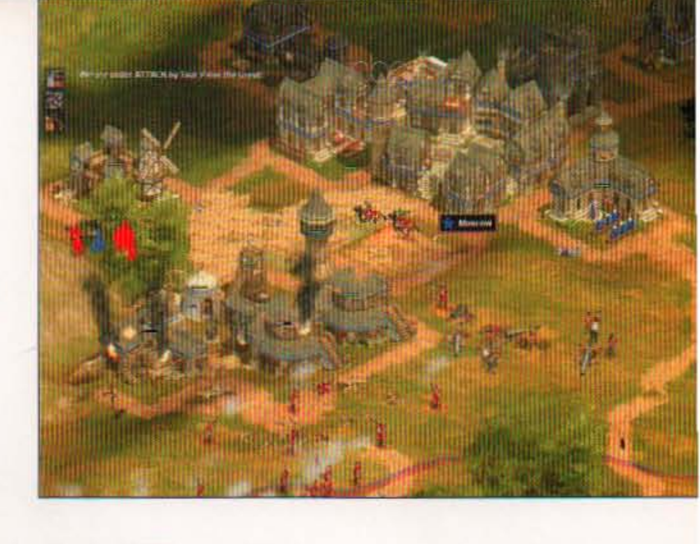
Forgive the apathy, but I honestly thought that a decent contingent of **Edge**'s readers would be able to respond faster than me. No review scores. Masterstroke. Review scores are the bane of film reviews. Review scores are utterly redundant when attached to music reviews. Review scores are de rigueur with game reviews, and it's here, in the young industry's culture of numbers-obsession and digital, on-or-off logic, where they arguably have the potential to do the most harm.

Review scores remind me of the scene in 'Dead Poets' Society' where Robin Williams renders ludicrous and tyrannical the entire idea of 'scoring' poetry – yet the idea was largely ignored that this could maybe be some kind of metaphor, that maybe assigning an arbitrary numeric grade to *any* work of art is a puerile gesture that diminishes the artistic value of even the most mediocre output.

Some time ago, Steven Poole wrote a Trigger Happy column on the subject of analogue/digital interfaces. His underlying point, or at least the way I interpreted it, was that the human animal is not a digital one. We are analogue. We have peaks and valleys in our appreciation of an experience, and sometimes we need something a little more descriptive than a scale of 1 to 10 to describe this appreciation. Even the hackneyed device of scoring a number of (increasingly silly) components of a game can't begin to quantify how a person experiences a game.

As a discussion of artistic output, **Edge**'s reviews are pretty much unmatched. Taking the next logical step, of totally doing away with arbitrary ratings, was a brave step and one I would urge you to consider further. (Don't worry about us – you've always done what you do and followed through confidently, and I think you'll find that this confidence in **Edge**'s decisions spreads to your readership).

Oh, and a closing aside: your matter-of-fact disassembling of the reviewing machine in the same issue is to be applauded: not for any kind of revelation of industry practices (which you never really claimed to offer), so much as for the fact that such a cold, unsympathetic laying bare of the shortcomings of the art of criticism offers up the challenge for readers to be more literate and questioning of the hallowed videogame critic. And because, of course, you are, in effect, throwing down the gauntlet for **Edge** readers to demand only the highest standard of critiquing from **Edge** itself. Which is welcome.
Tom



Are the isometric graphics in *Rise of Nations* backward looking? Perhaps, given that every other leading RTS has benefited from the switch to 3D

Kevin Williams makes a fair point about the origins of *Stunt Car Racer* (**E**126); the similarities between it and *Hard Drivin'* are many. *Hard Drivin'* was full of leaps and ramps; like *Stunt Car Racer* it wasn't a 'straight' racer and its crude polygon vehicles are of the same family.

In fairness, almost every 3D driving game or flight sim of that era adopted a similar visual style out of necessity and if that alone constitutes plagiarism there isn't an original game on the market. It's worth pointing out that *Stunt Car Racer* played much better than the home versions of *Hard Drivin'* too.

I can remember in the early ZX Spectrum years that each month brought a slew of new releases reviewed in magazines, often accompanied by remarks that they were 'highly original'. It's only in the last few years that – thanks to MAME mainly – it can be seen that very, very, few of these games did anything other than completely rip off obscure arcade or console titles that very few gamers would have come across at the time.

If anyone wants to truly set the record straight and stop 'revisionist' games history, they'll have to go a lot further back than *Stunt Car Racer*.
Aonghus de Barra

I don't know if you're interested but I'm pretty sure Kevin Williams has got it wrong in your letters page. I can be sure that Geoff Crammond didn't copy *Hard Drivin'* because I was at Telecomsoft when he was writing *Stunt Car Racer*.

We were at lunch one day in Soho and I asked him if he wanted to pop into the arcades to look at this new Atari driving game called *Hard Drivin'* (or possibly *Race Drivin'*) because there were some great levels and maybe he could get some ideas. He said he definitely didn't want to because he didn't want to be accused of ripping them off.
Colin Fuidge

Well. There you have it.



"We have peaks and valleys in our appreciation of an experience, and sometimes we need something a little more descriptive than a scale of 1 to 10 to describe this"

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Viewtiful Joe (GameCube)



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Advance Wars 2 (Game Boy Advance)



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Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire (Game Boy Advance)



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Pillage (PC, PS2, GC, Xbox)



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